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THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

The Shanghai Gesture: *a Play*

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With an Introduction by
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N O T E

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A PLAY BOY OF THE EASTERN WORLD

AS SHANGHAI GESTURES GO

OF making plays, there is no end. Of producing plays, there is no end. Of reading plays, there *is* an end, despite the leaning of the first of the Lambs, not he of the Club, but Charles, who would have it that a play acted had never the relish for him—(his reference was especially to Shakespeare)—as a play read.

So far as his thought went, he was right. Nothing is more tantalizing than to read the manuscript of a play as it leaves its author's hands, usually an eight-pounder—probably long, repetitious, essayistically even though brilliantly written—and then to see it acted, cut, forced within the inevitable limitations of the two-hours' traffic of the stage, the confines of the proscenium arch.

Yet there are few rarer delights than that of seeing the delightful acting of a meaningfully written play, an honest slice of life, and then, directly afterwards, to hie one's self home and flavor it all over again, tasting its subtleties, as it were acting each of its rôles, reading between as well as in the lines, with the printed manuscript before you.

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Thus the joy of the printed G. Bernard the Shaw, even though all that Bernards is not Shaw. Hence the relish that comes of the printed page of Eugene O'Neill, who himself once unwillingly conjugated the verb "to shanghai."

It was a bit of a word in its day—"shanghai." It is not often heard—much less understood—nowadays. It went out when the old sloops, cutters and four-masters left the seas. They use the word a bit about Dublin now and then, or rather they misuse it. The average radical Irishman thinks that to be shanghaied is to be strung up. In its first sense, as everybody should know, it meant that a lad or a loafer or a needed able seaman was lured into some dive or other, not only lured but liquored up, or even doped, then bundled up, to find himself the following day on high seas, actively in service or in irons.

Thus was Eugene O'Neill shanghaied, the best thing that ever happened to him. It was his father's desperate device to fetch to his senses a youngster, handsome, gifted, promising in every way, but too adventure-loving. "Gene" O'Neill was shanghaied. But out of this then seemingly appalling, devastating experience, years later came that terse, flawless English—that matchlessly succinct idiom of the sea and seamen—which is O'Neill's, and the wonder-world of drama, irony, actualism, which is the glory of his plays—and that make them even greater on the

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printed page than when acted on the stage. It was the sea where Conrad, Dana, Marryat, Verne and Melville learned their English; for if there is one place on earth where the *mot juste* is inevitably uttered, it is on the deck of a ship at sea—or better, when a ship is in trouble.

“Shanghaied,” as a word, itself got to be shanghaied. In its various forms it was kicked about from port to port, much as the sailors roved from dock to dock years ago. Then the word wandered East, to Shanghai itself, where it took on another meaning. Words are as vagrant as persons; they roam; they loaf about parks, they lose their roots, their repute. They happen on each other in strange places, spoken by vulgar lips or commercial tongues, and then they say to one another, word to word, “Hullo, how do you happen to be here?” Well brought up words, once aristocrats, drift into what we call the vulgate; they get on the town. These once lovely words—they flit and conflict with life, and thus they are distorted. Once I met an old hag of a word—worn, wearing a shawl, gray-haired, but fascinatingly cynical. Her name was *Inform*. Her service—(she had waited upon Johnson, Goldsmith, Sheridan and “Bozzy”)—had been to convey intention, meaning, idealfulness, identity of word with thought. But her servitors passed away; and so she was put out—on the streets—this aristocrat of words. She sank. And when I met her,

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Inform meant merely gossip, telling of a bit of news—passing the scandal.

When the world puts its heel on a derelict, when life is just a little bit too hard, when a man is marooned, by parents or otherwise, before he has a chance to plead, he is wont to accept his condition—if there is no way out—but he only accepts his fate after making the “Shanghai Gesture.” The gesture is simple. It is useful. It is comforting. It does something for you and to you, because the world cannot answer—in kind—if you make the gesture first.

Attendez! Por ejemplo!! Place the fingers of your right hand extended. Distend the thumb of your right hand until it touches your nose. The little finger of your right hand is stretched venomously towards the world. You say nothing but you think much, and that is that. The gesture is made; and an ugly world is scoffed.

It was twenty years or so ago when a lad was shoved off from Yokohama by near-relatives, impatient with him, misunderstanding him, eager to be rid of him, as James O'Neill, of “Monte Cristo” fame, was eager to be rid of Eugene O'Neill. This boy too was shanghaied. There was nothing exceptional about the procedure in those days. Heaps of New Englanders had it happen to them. The long recognized classic, “Two Years Before The Mast,” by Richard Dana, would never have been, had not the

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said Richard been shanghaied. But the lad of fourteen, our subject—or shall we say, object—thus shanghaied, taking it with spunk, as a frolic, as a lark, as a release from impossible near-relatives, got from what others might think adversity, a great nugget of wisdom—the shanghai gesture. For, as they bundled him off, he said just that to the world—a thumb to the nose, the fingers distended—“It’s a bit of a world; but that’s what I think of it.”

There is this to be said about being youthful—not young, but youthful—things stick. Years afterwards—in a well-shaped head, covered by thick, black hair and animated by an agile, vibrant, courtly figure—voiced by a speech slightly over-English, but warming, engaging, dissuading even when he was wrong—there lingered the poignant significance of having been shanghaied to other ports.

Eventually he was in England—at Harrow on the heath. From Yokohama to Harrow is a bit of a jump. But as jumps were in his way, and as jumps go, next he was in Arizona—on a ranch—with another lad, another runaway from Harrow.

Now they were shanghai-ing themselves. As a celebration was the card in hand, it had to be. Candles are only candles, but lamps may be kerosene. Thus the ranch ended in a gorgeous bonfire.

Again the *wanderlust*. Again the process of conjugating the verb “to shanghai.” But now these lads

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shanghaied themselves in different directions. They were graduated to the estate of those happy, because aimless, souls—wanderers. The shanghai gesture had been implanted in them. They exercised it—practiced it at large.

Without a penny between them, they separated. The one went, Heaven knows where. He—the benefactor of the pages that follow—had learned the solace of the shanghai gesture. He went West, anywhere, anyhow—a waiter, a cook, a nomad—but always possessed and obsessed of the eagerness to write; and naturally so, because he was garnering life in sheaves. Life was generous to him; she poured herself through him—melodiously, colorfully, dramatically, caustically, but abundantly. Cub reporter, dramatic critic, short-story writer—always *cacoethes scribendi*. But ever, and importunately, the *wanderlust*. To walk on one's toes, to sample the pavements rather than to tread upon them, to speculate with life rather than to commit one's self to it; to taste life but never to gorge of it. And if the world gets rude—always the salutary shanghai gesture.

One's own philosophy, like one's private murder, will out. Thus revolved and eventually evolved the theme, that attitude towards life that had been carried around for years—the arresting, Greek-like, stunningly performed, as it is flawlessly written,

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tragi-comedy, "The Shanghai Gesture." It is at this very hour fascinatingly performed—Why?—*Because it is not acted*. Salutations, on our way, to Miss Florence Reed—she who knows and gives the theatre so unerringly the distinction between an actress and an artist; she who exemplifies so poignantly that nuance that lies between being and merely acting a part.

But oh, the vicissitudes of *any* play manuscript! Some day, somebody will write the Uncle Tom's Cabin of a worthy, stage history-making play. Lo, the poor playwright! Fancy this for an episode—actual as to situation. The text you are about to read, submitted on all sides to the theater realtors—Moe, Abe, Isidore, and Mark—was finally listened to by "Charlie." The author, seated in "Charlie's" office, begins to read his manuscript. Telephone calls from "Mildred," "Louise," "Mabel" and the storehouse interrupt frequently. "Charlie" is rated as a bit of a bird. His idea of a century is engaging an actress. But there he is now—periodically listening—at least listening in—on the manuscript. He takes the various messages and answers, always ending with, "Go on, go on; I'm list'nin'," to the waiting author. The author does go on, till he reaches the passage, "Oh, to be in England, when England is in Spring."

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"Wait a minute," "Charlie" exclaims, "you mean sprung."

"Oh, no, Spring," protests the author. "'When England is in Spring'—Spring—the season."

Whereat "Charlie" says, "Oh, I thought you meant *sprung*— To me, England ain't got no such season. It's a joke! When was there ever Spring in England? English jokes, English fog, London buses, and all that, but Spring? No! You ain't got your *atmosphere* right."

Some day in this country, now garnering the best, artistically, of all the world, it will be realized that there is a vast difference between a good performance and a good play. The first depends upon the actors, the second upon the author. The good play is actor-proof. Fools, amateurs, non-efficients, can appear in a good play, and the play will survive. But only the finished artist can, by his magic, palm off a performance into the semblance of a play.

"Did any one," said Sir Henry Irving, "ever hear of a bad Ophelia? In fact, any Hamlet, though dull, cannot be devastating. Actor-proof plays—such! But let me see an actor upon whom is all the burden—a one-part play—and if he turns a performance into a play, I nominate him an artist."

It is a rare combination—the fine performance of a fine play. The Barrymores may, and did, prosper in "The Jest," but in other hands it perished. Maude

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Adams had twenty-five years of glory in Barrie, but all followers in the same rôles fall by the wayside. The father of E. H. Sothern was epochal as "Lord Dundreary," but his son, in the same rôle, lagged superfluous on the stage.

There is a hope that goes with a printed text—that the play will be seen as well as read. Characters, unlike victuals, are best served when they are underdone. Chanticleer said it when he announced that the true artist always stops before the end. Sargent, Whistler, Rossetti, Turner, and almost any of the Pre-Raphaelites, how well they knew it—the glory of the *premier coup*. And what is the *premier coup*? Stopping before the end!

With these more (and I suspect) less remarks, I adopt the same principle—*Le Premier Coup*. I stop before the end.

I yield the following pages to the writings of a young, dark-haired, gay, life-loving, deep-voiced acrobat in English, magician in the theater—John Colton—of Yokohama, Harrow on the heath, New York, Harvey's restaurants, Arizona, Los Angeles, and all way-stations—A Play Boy of the Eastern World.

JOHN D. WILLIAMS.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARACTERS

SIR GUY CHARTERIS, Taipan of the British China
Trading Co.

PRINCE OSHIMA

POPPY

NI-PAU (Lost Petal)

EX-ENVOY MANDARIN KOO LOT FOO, the Great Jade
King

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

CHING CHANG MARY

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON, Port Judge of Shanghai

LADY BLESSINGTON

MONS. LE COMTE de MICHOT, "Number One" of the
Bank of Europe-Asia

MME. LA COMTESSE DE MICHOT

DON QUEREBRO D'ACHUNA, Chargé d'Affaires of
Latin America

DONNA QUEREBRO D'ACHUNA

DUDLEY GREGORY, "Number One" of the United
States Oil Co.

MRS. DUDLEY GREGORY

and

MOTHER GOD DAMN of No. 17 San Kaiou Road

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Lin Chi, the Mole, Chief Clerk	}	Servants at No. 17 San Kaiou Road
Tsa, The Eunuch		
Cho Tsi, the Amah		
First Houseboy		
Second Houseboy		
First Coolie		
Second Coolie		
The apprentice "Mice" 1	}	Occupants of "The Gallery of Laughing Dolls"
2		
3		
4		

The action of the play takes place during Chinese New Year's, from noon day to the dawn of the following day, in the far-famed house of Mother God Damn, 17 San Kaiou Road, Shanghai, China.

The Time is the Present

- ACT I Noon Day
 "The Gallery of Laughing Dolls"
- ACT II The Same evening—9 o'clock
 "The Grand Red Hall of Lily and Lotus
 Roots"
- ACT III Same evening—toward midnight
 "The Little Room of the Great Cat"
- ACT IV The same evening—Midnight

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Scene 1—"The Green Stairway of the
Angry Dragon"

Scene 2—A few moments before dawn
"Before the Buddha of Priceless Jade—
the Talking God of Ja Ken Kow"

ACT I

ACT I

The Gallery of Laughing Dolls.

The scene is an alcove room, opening upon a broadish corridor. This alcove is in the nature of a little reception room—a sort of halfway station along a presumably lengthy gallery. It is furnished in teakwood—a big writing table, two chairs, and a smoking stand. On the floor is a fine rug.

The corridor is lined with cages in which sit girls. The cages are of gilded bamboo. They rest on high standards of carved wood and are decked with draperies of multihued brocade and many gay flower garlands. Each is lit with electric light and equipped with bright mats and charcoal braziers. The predominating color notes of this scene are blue and coral.

The curtain lifts on a bedlam of sound. The GIRLS in the cages are screaming and laughing as they tease the coolies who are busy hanging the last of the New Year decorations—animals and fish of paper—dragonhead bladders—balloons, and such. One of the girls has a gilded fishing rod. To the end of this she has attached a

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"fizzle" fire cracker. She is poking this at a coolie on the top of a step ladder, who is trying to hang a garland. He is cursing her. She is screeching. The other coolies are laughing. The other girls are yelling and pointing. Seated at the teakwood table in the alcove is CÆSAR-HAWKINS, who is trying to write. He is a tall, fair-haired young Englishman in his early thirties—a little down-at-heel in appearance.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Oh—stop that infernal racket! Stop it, I say—at once!

[He jumps to his feet and stalks angrily to the corridor and looks off left. The GIRLS turn their jeers upon him. He clasps his hands to his ears and looks about him in despair.]

Stop it, I say! Stop it at once!

[The GIRLS continue to jeer at him. He shouts at them distractedly. While the uproar is at its height, LIN CHI, the Mole, chief clerk of the establishment, enters. He is a wizened, shrimpish little man with a crooked spine and wicked eyes gleaming behind babu spectacles.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS turns to him appealingly.]

Oh, make them stop it, won't you? They've been screeching and screaming and jumping about that way for the last hour.

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[LIN CHI shouts an angry order in Chinese to the GIRLS.]

How much longer does this beastly New Year's last anyway? It's been going on for three days now.

LIN CHI

To-night—midnight—all finish!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*As the noise in the cages subsides.*]

Three days of Chinese hell! Punk—joss—temple devils! And howling beggars—God send midnight!

LIN CHI

[*Coolly picking his teeth.*]

What you know? Chinese New Year very sacred time. Most religious time. Time to make good feeling with all gods. All China people pay all debts on New Year's—no pay—all year bad luck. Why you never pay?

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*With a short laugh.*]

Does an empty pond have fish? Granted, I got drunk here—I made debts here—and here I am stuck like a fly on a gum pad—here in the house of Mother God Damn.

LIN CHI

Humph!

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CÆSAR-HAWKINS

My job—any shoe you want to put on my luckless foot. I write her chits—drive her car—read her stars—run her errands—compose her poems. . . .

LIN CHI

You are lucky you are not in jail.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

I might get a drop of sleep in jail.

LIN CHI

You no good. You lazy man.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Aggrievedly.*]

The woman's sleepless—I read her Marie Corelli this morning until six o'clock. She's incessant. She had me up at nine. I've trotted the dog out twice. I've watered her lily roots— And I've rubbed her back.

LIN CHI

[*Severely—indicating pile of invitations on desk.*]

Have you written invitations to every one she told you to?

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Slumping into his chair.*]

Yes—here's the list. See for yourself.

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LIN CHI

[Indifferently.]

Hm! What's the matter with you?

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

This is February, isn't it? Soon it will be spring in England——

[He rises and begins to pace back and forth regardless of LIN CHI—yet talking to him.]

Tell me, Mr. Lin Chi, did you ever see a crocus come popping out of the earth? Did you ever see a lark rise straight out of a field its heart bursting to pieces with its song? Tell me, did you?

LIN CHI

[Grunting.]

Umph!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[Ruefully.]

I'm ill! I have Anglothéria—I'm ill for England.

LIN CHI

[Unmirthfully.]

He-he-he!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[Shaking off his mood.]

Tell me, Mr. Lin Chi—you know everything about this place. I'm curious. Why is the Madame giving

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this grand dinner to-night and inviting all the swells in town?

LIN CHI

[*Mysteriously.*]

Umph!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

She may get the men to come—but if she gets their stuck-up wives into this house—my name's not Cæsar-Hawkins!

LIN CHI

[*Tapping the invitations.*]

Wives will come, too. Everybody will break all other appointments quick when they get these. You will see.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

You mean—they'll be afraid not to come, eh?—because she has the underneath on all of 'em?

LIN CHI

[*Snorting.*]

Po! She has the underneath on all China matters—all kinds things! All kinds people! When she finds out from Mr. Koo Lot Foo if Sir Charteris can come to-night, she will send out these. Every one will say, "Yes—thank you very much." This Charteris will say yes, too.

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CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Charteris? Is that who she sent old Koo Lot Foo scuttling off to see this morning?

[*Incredulously.*]

The Charteris here? Sir Guy Charteris of the British-China Trading Company?

LIN CHI

[*Nodding.*]

Yes, that is the high-up person—Mr. Koo Lot Foo has gone to ask.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

I say—she's out for nobs to-night.

LIN CHI

[*Meaningly.*]

Yes—this Charteris fellow is Number One man in richest firm in China—very aristocratic man—most English aristocrat in Shanghai.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

And if he should refuse—there'd be no party, eh?

LIN CHI

[*Grimly.*]

He will not refuse.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

But why does this whole dinner depend on *him*?

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LIN CHI

She has reason; always Mother God Damn has reason for everything. Many years I am her chief clerk—never anything does she do without reason. You will see.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

I know this Charteris chap by sight—good-looking cove—tall, fairish hair, neat shoulders—always wears an eyeglass. . . .

LIN CHI

Ye-s!—This Taipan is damn big swell here—very swagger—very handsome fellow. . . .

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Dashes about town in a big Sota Francini car. . . .

LIN CHI

In Shanghai there are only two Sota Francini motor cars—one is his—one is ours.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

I've noticed several times when I've been out with her, she's sort of gone out of her way to cross his path—he always stares at her—but she never notices him—but after he's passed, she laughs like hell.

[*Pause.*]

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Damn funny thing—we came near giving him a nasty spill the other day.

LIN CHI

Spill! What is that?

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Accident. We came bang onto his car at the turn into the Wang Po bridge. She leaned forward and jerked the chauffeur's arm. Do you know I could swear she tried to run him down?

LIN CHI

Augh!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Next day he came here and left his card. I thought she'd laugh herself to death.

LIN CHI

Many times this Charteris has left his card here—always she says, "I am not at home"—and always very much laugh.

[*The telephone rings. This is an instrument attached to the wall in the Chinese fashion. LIN CHI takes off the receiver and replies in the squeaky voice Orientals always feel it is necessary to employ over the wire.*]

Herro! Herro! Herro! Yes, this is Number 17

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SAN KIAOU ROAD. This is house of Mother God Damn. What you want? Oh, appointment? We have all kinds girls, all kinds rooms, all kinds prices—what? Oh, I beg your pardon—Mr. Koo Lot Foo!

[He listens as another squeaky voice reverberates back through the wire, then answers in a fluent stream of Chinese.]

[He hangs up receiver.]

[To CÆSAR-HAWKINS.]

That was Mr. Koo Lot Foo. He is on his way here now.

[Sucking his toothpick.]

Very soon we will know if this Sir Charteris can come!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[Crossly.]

I wish you wouldn't chew a toothpick over my right ear. A murder would be less revolting!

[A gong sounds off stage. Voices are heard. A man's and a woman's. LIN CHI crosses and gazes down the gallery, then beckons mysteriously to CÆSAR-HAWKINS.]

Who is it?

LIN CHI

Prince Oshima!

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CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Who the devil is Prince Oshima?

LIN CHI

He is high class, very rich Japanese—belong big Samurai muzo-jiki house. Very roué fellow—go quick—tell Mother God Damn he has come.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Reluctant to move.*]

She won't see him—she won't see anybody. She's going to drive to Cherry Mountain to look at the New Year's plum blossoms. It's a ceremonial she wouldn't miss for anything, she says.

LIN CHI

She will see him.

[*Pointing.*]

Look—English lady is with him. Tell her that!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

What of it?

LIN CHI

It will make her mad. Five years ago he was important diplomat at Peking from Japan. They have big row—she have him removed—he go away to

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Europe countries. Now he is back!—Hurry up and announce he has come.

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS *exits* and LIN CHI *draws to one side* as PRINCE OSHIMA *enters with a charmingly dressed girl*. OSHIMA is a young Japanese in his early thirties. He is tall and aristocratic in appearance and as faultlessly dressed for the morning as Bond Street can make him. He carries a walking stick and a soft felt hat. The Girl, POPPY, is exquisite as a summer morning. Everything about her spells youth and beauté de diable. She is small, slender, willowy and graceful—a gentlewoman to the tips of her fingers, yet there is an alien something in her brunette beauty, something a little odd and fantastic. Since the time is February and the air still a little chill, there are touches of fur in her dress.]

OSHIMA

[*Pointing with his stick.*]

See! The cages begin here—they stretch this way——

[*Pointing left.*]

and that way—they call this the Chu Tchen Kying way—the gallery of the laughing dolls.

[*He speaks English with only the slightest trace of accent.*]

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POPPY

And I suppose upstairs there are other rooms?

[*She has the beautiful modulated voice of a well-bred English girl.*]

OSHIMA

Scores! All manner of them. Some of them are really wonderful.

POPPY

So I've heard. Chrysolite—lapis-lazuli. Isn't there one room all gold?

OSHIMA

That's hers—Mother God Damn's—she has a big cat in it—of solid gold.

[*To POPPY.*]

You know—you're seeing one of the sights of the world!

POPPY

[*With a laugh.*]

Not of my world!

OSHIMA

Certainly—your world. Any world out here. China shouldn't be looked at with western eyes—Here, make your eyes Chinese—your ears Chinese—

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your mind Chinese. It may seem brutal—but it's all merely the customs of the country and must be looked at that way or not at all.

POPPY

Goose! Did you think I was shocked?

[She examines the cages with lively interest.]

Look at the girls! Some of them are really darling!

OSHIMA

They call them "mice." When visitors come—they're said to be micing!

POPPY

[Making a face at him.]

What a sweet thought! Look at this little one with coral in her ears. She's like something on a tea-cup!

OSHIMA

They've changed the place a bit since I was here five years ago. If old Lin Chi's still here, I'll have him show us about.

POPPY

No, I mustn't stop. I really mustn't.

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OSHIMA

Nonsense—you must meet the great God Damn before you go.

POPPY

What a funny name!—They say she wears chunks of emerald jade and pearls as big as robins' eggs! Is she full-blooded Chinese?

OSHIMA

Manchu—I should say!—She never talks of herself but there is a strange history somewhere there.

POPPY

[*Laughing.*]

One of the embassy chaps told me he sat up all night with her once discussing the Einstein theory.

OSHIMA

She's most proud of her English—uses it on all occasions—even with her servants——

POPPY

A much traveled lady, too, isn't she?

OSHIMA

She's been everywhere—she first came into prominence many years ago through the Mandarin Koo Lot Foo.

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POPPY

That immensely rich jade-man?

OSHIMA

Yes. When the naughty old man was made envoy to Russia, he took her with him as his niece. She went into every court and capital in Europe.

POPPY

So I've heard. People used to stand on one another's shoulders, didn't they, to see her come into the opera?

OSHIMA

They called her "The Chinese Lily." Pierre Loti wrote a poem to her—and Sargent painted her. Duchesses copied her hair and Worth designed gowns for her . . . then it all came out that she wasn't old Koo's niece at all. He was forced to confess he had picked her up on the Shanghai water front. So she returned to China, immensely rich—and set up here.

POPPY

Ah-h. I think—I think if things were not what they are with me—I should choose to become that kind of woman—I hate good people!

[*Pauses irresolutely.*]

I'd love to stop, Oshima—but I daren't to-day.

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OSHIMA

You daren't? You!

POPPY

Shanghai— isn't Paris——

OSHIMA

[Insinuatingly.]

And Paris isn't the Orient.

[She meets his eyes and laughs. He sees LIN CHI.]

Hey, Lin Chi—come here—remember me?

[LIN CHI approaches, bowing.]

LIN CHI

Prince Oshima—yes. How are you, Prince Oshima, how are you?

OSHIMA

[To POPPY.]

This is Mr. Lin Chi, Poppy. That means "Mole" in Chinese. There isn't a secret in Shanghai he doesn't know.

LIN CHI

Lin Chi knows all secrets—yes.

OSHIMA

And tells them all to Mother God Damn. That's

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why this evil city trembles—in the hollow of her hand.

LIN CHI

[Inquiringly.]

Prince Oshima maybe now stay in China a little while?

OSHIMA

No. I came in from France—on the boat last night. I'm going to Japan to-morrow morning.

LIN CHI

[Looking at POPPY.]

Young European lady want look around—look—see? Upstairs many new girls have got—want look—see? Very beautiful girls—nice dresses—very grand.

OSHIMA

[To LIN CHI.]

Not now—get us a bottle of champagne, will you?

[LIN CHI starts to exit.]

[There is a burst of shrieking and squealing in the cages.]

POPPY

Oh, look! They're fighting.

[She runs to look at it.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

Come back, Poppy!

[LIN CHI calls an order from the corridor, the hubbub instantly stops.]

POPPY

The little devils! One girl was going at another with a hairpin. How they do claw and bite!

OSHIMA

[Drawing her to him with a low laugh, then holding her off to feast on her loveliness.]

Ah, Chesai—Komo—these mice are not the only ones with claws and teeth. I still have marks of teeth on my neck—and on my shoulders—the marks of nails. . . .

POPPY

[With a wicked little giggling laugh.]

Have you—you dear old thing?

OSHIMA

Sharp white teeth on my neck—beautiful wild nails on my shoulders.

[He shakes her gently back and forth.]

Teeth like little points of hot ivory—nails like little thin shavings from opal stones—cutting—cutting—cutting—so . . .

[He draws her to him.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

What beautiful, wicked, wonderful pain they brought! Now a whole year has passed, but I can feel it—stabbing—stabbing—stabbing—Poppy, *Che-sai Komo!*

[*His voice caresses her.*]

Stinging butterfly——

POPPY

Sh-h! Some one may hear you. The mice things there are looking at us.

OSHIMA

Ho! What are mice to a tiger—Tiger-girl Poppy!

POPPY

Some one might come——

OSHIMA

What does it matter? Tell me, Poppy, do you remember—one year ago in Paris——

POPPY

Yes, Armenonville——

OSHIMA

It is a night that stays always, like a night from which one has just waked up! It is in my heart——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

always—like Fuji fire—in my memory like the blood of *yashi* fruit, which never washes out.

[*Boy enters with champagne. OSHIMA signals for him to go and pours wine.*]

POPPY

[*Laughing.*]

There's where our eyes first met—and I said to myself: "What a beautiful man"—then my heart began to thump, and thump and thump.

[*She sips the wine he offers her.*]

[*OSHIMA leaning toward her.*]

I'm all English, too—we're supposed to be cold——

OSHIMA

White fire is hotter than all.

POPPY

When the waiter brought your note to *me*—for a moment I couldn't breathe——

OSHIMA

But you came with me. . . .

POPPY

And we drove and drove . . .

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

And then—you were a cruel girl, Poppy—why did you leave me? Only a little note on the empty pillow beside me—when I woke in the morning! It was a very heartless thing—you have no heart, I think. . . .

POPPY

Did you try to find me?

OSHIMA

I've never stopped trying—it was like looking for one raindrop that has fallen into the sea——

POPPY

That cold morning—when I kissed you good-by, you stirred a little—and I knew if you woke I wouldn't go. But I had to get back to school—so they wouldn't know I'd run away. I was sailing for China— Oh, how I ran through the halls of that hotel—if I hadn't run, my head would have gone wild again—and I must run now——

[She stops, panting.]

OSHIMA

[Drawing her to him, fiercely.]

No! Do you think I'm going to let you go—now I've found you like a miracle? Think of it—if I

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

hadn't started out of the hotel—the very moment you turned in this morning—little lost raindrop. Poppy—we must be alone together——

POPPY

When?

OSHIMA

To-day!

POPPY

No, no!

OSHIMA

I am leaving China early to-morrow morning. I may not come back again. Why not—now—Poppy?

POPPY

No, no! My motor is down the street.

OSHIMA

Where is your daring—has China taught you fear?

POPPY

The servants watch one like cats—this is a city of eyes—and tongues—and one whisper of anything would kill my father. He's rigid—proud—girls weren't like me when he was young. He doesn't know

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

what girls are now—my mother died when I was born—I'm all he has. . . .

[She laughs a little crazily.]

He must never know what a wicked girl I am.

OSHIMA

I must have you——

POPPY

[Hoarsely.]

And I must have you——

[She pauses and looks at him, panting.]

OSHIMA

Ah, then you are—still—Tiger Girl!

POPPY

[Putting her hands on his shoulders, looking into his eyes, her voice coming through her teeth.]

I am going to a ball to-night. It will last until very late. If I could slip away—and meet you—where could we go?

OSHIMA

Here! No one would ever know!

POPPY

But this woman who runs this place—might find out who I am——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

She can't. And the only name I know is Poppy.

POPPY

I will meet you under the Soochow Arch, as soon after eleven as I can manage. My rickshaw will be waiting in the dark. . . .

OSHIMA

I'll be waiting. And we'll come—here?

POPPY

[Drawing a deep breath.]

It all—fascinates me!

[Pauses—shivering a little.]

What mustn't these walls have seen—beautiful things—dreadful things!

OSHIMA

They've seen emperors deposed—states unmade!

POPPY

[With a little laugh.]

If there are ghosts—I'll wager plenty of them—moan up and down these corridors at night.

OSHIMA

[Stroking his wrist.]

Yes, there's a big population in this house we cannot see.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

[*With a slight shiver.*]

And I daresay it's increasing every day!

[*Pauses—laughs excitedly, with dilated nostrils.*]

I love the smell.

[*Sniffs.*]

It smells—oh! so incredibly evil!

[*A low laugh is heard—a woman's laugh—coming from somewhere—nowhere! OSHIMA and POPPY start. A panel in the coral wall swings back, revealing MOTHER GOD DAMN—smiling ironically at them both. The lady is dressed for her drive. Her cloak, dress and head-dress are in the best taste of the Chinese lady of fashion—simple and very rich—a long jacket of deep yellow brocade fastened on the shoulder by a jewel, an unpleated skirt of lighter yellow—and a closely fitting bandeau of rich metal filagree material, covering forehead and ears and fastening under the coil in the neck. Ropes of pearls and strings of jade hang around MOTHER GOD DAMN's throat—her little hands sparkle with fine rings. Like all Chinese women of distinction she is powdered and painted to a degree. Now she is alert—her whole key domination, tempered by subtle mockery.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Hola! Oshima—Oshima, hola!

[*She puts out her hand.*]

Happy New Year! So you have come back to me at last!

[*Her English speech is almost perfect. The speech of a Chinese woman who has learned her English in a cosmopolitan school. If anything, it is a little too precise, her "a's" too broad and the difficult Chinese "r" meticulously avoided.*]

OSHIMA

[*Bending over it.*]

Hola, Mother God Damn! Mother God Damn... hola!

[*MOTHER GOD DAMN steps into the room. Following her comes an amah carrying a fine sable coat. After the amah comes CÆSAR-HAWKINS holding in leash two romping Pekinese dogs—resplendent with bells and flowers. OSHIMA moves, treading on one of the dogs.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Sharply.*]

Take them, Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins!

[*Smiles wickedly at OSHIMA.*]

[*To CÆSAR-HAWKINS.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Keep a watch at the garden gate for Mr. Koo Lot Foo. Tell him I am waiting for him here and not to linger.

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS *exits with dogs, followed by the amah.* MOTHER GOD DAMN *crosses to* OSHIMA.]

Do I behold again my evil one—now life begins again—for me.

OSHIMA

[*To POPPY.*]

Always she mocks like this—this woman!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I do not mock! All the long time you were away, I have been like Penelope, that fat Greek wife, who stayed at home in grief to sigh—and—spin.

OSHIMA

Always this woman spins!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

But it is not wool I spin.

OSHIMA

No?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No. I spin bad mischiefs—for—a rival!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

[*To MOTHER GOD DAMN.*]

I should like to introduce to you——

[*He hesitates.*]

Miss S-smith.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah! Miss Smith.

[*To POPPY.*]

Which Miss Smith? So many people come here by the name of Smith.

[*She puts out her hand.*]

I am very pleased to meet Miss Smith—Moken Kio—Kiowa chon—Happy New Year, Miss Smith!

POPPY

Happy New Year!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

But come, Oshima, recite to me—the saga of your deeds—while you have been away.

[*To POPPY.*]

This man's deeds always concern love matters. Very indecent love matters. He is a person of no morals.

POPPY

Tell me about Prince Oshima's morals!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

No, don't listen to her, Poppy. She will tell you lies.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Lies! Lies! I do not tell lies. I detect them. So much less stupid. Is that not so—Miss Smith? Yet without them—what a tragic place this world would be. All of us—what we really are—not what we seem. Now I ask you, Miss Smith, would not that be funny?

[*Laughs.*]

Life would have no spice at all! None at all!

[*To POPPY.*]

Are you two old friends?

POPPY

Not old. Prince Oshima and I met only once—a year ago—in Paris, when I was finishing school in France.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And now you meet in Shanghai?

POPPY

Quite by accident.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Of course. Of course. And having met, you both come here—that is as it should be——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

I was coming here to see you—Miss Smith kindly offered to drive me a little way.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

—And ended—by driving you the whole way?

POPPY

Not quite.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You left your car around the corner?—Ah, I see—the whole way not quite yet—I take it that you live in Shanghai?

POPPY

Yes, I live in Shanghai.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I do not think I have ever seen you. And yet it would almost seem as though I had——

POPPY

[*Hurriedly.*]

How beautiful your pearls are!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Carelessly.*]

These are only fair—for morning wear alone. The

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Russian Grand Duke Leopold meant them for that dancer, Olga Trepanova—but as you see, their destination got mixed!

OSHIMA

Objects intended for other people often do get mixed and come to Mother God Damn.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Flatterer!

POPPY

And that jade?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

The jade *is* lovely—the priceless emerald vein from the mine of Mr. Koo Lot Foo, the great Jade King—who was my uncle! The Empress Dowager I understand was very angry when that dear good man gave so much of it to me—his niece——

[*Pause.*]

No—we did not like each other—that one and I!

[*Taps her chest and smiles maliciously. A zither begins to strum off stage.*]

OSHIMA

Madam, as you see, has no reverence for persons in high places—neither kings nor queens!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No image hewer worships the gods—he knows what stuff they are made of. I have no reverence for a king in bed—too many such has Mother God Damn seen. C'est moi qui parle.

POPPY

What a funny name you have—Mother God Damn.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You think so?

POPPY

Yes.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

It is distinctive, is it not? Very chic, eh?

POPPY

What does it mean?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

What does it mean?

[*Mischievously.*]

It means "I love you."

POPPY

[*Amazed.*]

I love you——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Nodding.*]

And it is a name symbolic of my craft.

POPPY

Your craft? How can you make God-damn mean
I love you. It sounds to me like witchcraft!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No—not witchcraft.

[*Smiles—pauses—then ironically.*]

Rather let us call it—bitchcraft.

[*Pauses.*]

And I must tell you—in all modesty——

OSHIMA

Of course, of course.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

—that I am held to be symbolic of that craft in
all its aspects.

[*Pauses wickedly.*]

Eh, Oshima?

OSHIMA

[*Bowing.*]

I answer yes——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

But for the naughty name itself I have to thank the rough humor of the foreign sailor—witty fellows who for many years have taught ignorant China girls that “God damn” means “I love you.” Shall I show you?

[She crosses to the cages and draws her stick across the bars, giving the GIRLS a sharp order in Chinese. Instantly the GIRLS begin a queer falsetto chanting refrain.]

THE GIRLS IN THE CAGES

[Chanting.]

God-da—dam-mo—God-da—dam-mo—God-da—dam-mo—hai! Hai ho hai!

[The strumming of a Chinese mandolin and the squealing of a Chinese flute accompany this chant.]

[For a moment she listens, her head cocked to one side, her finger to her lips.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You hear them? They tell this Oshima—this St. Francis of Japan that they love him—handsome fellow, is he not? Do you wonder that they love him, Miss Smith?

[She calls an order—the refrain of the GIRLS stops. There is silence broken only by the beat of the zither.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Yae ye yah ye!—Goddamma—I love. I love you
—Goddamma—plot—plon—plot—o—plon—plot-o—
plon! God damma—I love you—yae ye yah ye!

[*Pauses—then in a tone tense with passionate
hate.*]

That is my name! Yae ye yah ye——

[*The music ceases. MOTHER GOD DAMN laughs
and pauses.*]

But let that pass.

POPPY

[*Nervously—a little frightened.*]

I see—I see.

[*She pulls herself together with a little laugh.*]

I must be going—I'll be late for tiffin.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Craftily.*]

If you have far to go and your tiffin is at one—
you will be late.

POPPY

Yes, I have quite a distance to go.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I am sure this part of Shanghai is not near your
home.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

No—and I rarely come over into the native city.

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS *enters.*]

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

I beg pardon, Madame, the dogs are nervous and anxious to be off. Mrs. Shi has bitten Mr. Wu.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

She is in no mood for his attentions. In future be more careful. Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins, this is Prince Oshima—you should know each other—two lazy men from Oxford College.

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS *and* OSHIMA *bow.*]

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Yes, I recall Prince Oshima now.

[*To* OSHIMA.]

You were appointed to the Japanese Embassy in Peking, weren't you?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Oh! Do not mention diplomacy to Prince Oshima. He is the ex-attaché to Peking from Japan—he was not long in diplomatic service—it did not suit him, eh, Oshima?

[*Laughs.*]

But let that pass.

[*She turns to* POPPY.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Miss Smith—this is Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins.

[POPPY and CÆSAR-HAWKINS bow.]

He is my major-domo, my own right hand—my poet laureate.

[MOTHER GOD DAMN continues mockingly.]

You see the world has tossed him up a bit since his scribblings at Oxford—we are now collaborating on a book—the poems of Mu Cha, the Chinese Sappho—ah, that woman's thoughts on the mirror of the soul!

[She sighs in ecstasy and POPPY gives a sudden amused laugh. MOTHER GOD DAMN turns sharply on her.]

Why do you laugh, Miss Smith?

POPPY

[Stopping her laughter.]

I don't know—it seems so odd for you to talk of mirrors of the soul!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Severely.]

Odd! Odd! You think I do not like to look into my soul? I am very fond of beauty! All Chinese are—they can watch torture while they stroke a lily or caress a bird.

[To OSHIMA.]

As you know——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

[*Bowing.*]

I know.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

In my opinion Mother God Damn has great poetic talent.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Flattered, to CÆSAR-HAWKINS.*]

You think so? Ah, yes—the book. When it is completed, there will be two shares—one to me—one to him.

[*She looks at CÆSAR-HAWKINS.*]

Of course from his half, I shall deduct his debt to me at ten per cent—his current living here—at ten Mex a day——

[*She pauses.*]

And also——

[*She coughs.*]

ahem! He has had pleasures here from time to time he thinks I do not know about—these he must pay for at the full rate—there is no reduction in such matters. The rest he is most welcome to. No one shall say I am a cheat!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Quite so! Quite so!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

I really must be going.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, yes. Miss Smith is in a hurry.

[OSHIMA *steps forward to accompany her.*]

POPPY

[*To OSHIMA.*]

Don't bother to come to the car with me. I'd rather you didn't.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Hastily.*]

Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins will see you to your car.

[*To CÆSAR-HAWKINS.*]

This will be a good chance for you to take Mr. Wu and Mrs. Shi into the road—it is wiser for them to ramble a bit before they drive, as you know.

[*To OSHIMA.*]

You perceive the mantle of the dog has fallen on another.

[*Looks at POPPY to see how she takes this.*
POPPY *bridles.*]

POPPY

Thank you, I perceive!

OSHIMA

[*Bowing.*]

And your reference is in the best of taste.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Tartly.*]

It does not always please me to be a lady. I can when I wish to be—therefore why should I?

[*To OSHIMA.*]

I am driving now to Cherry Mountain to see the New Year plum blossoms—come with me. I wish to hear what pretty European ladies you have stolen from their husbands.

[*She shakes her finger at him.*]

Ah, Casanova!

[*Turns affably to POPPY, with outstretched hands.*]

Au revoir, Miss Smith. May I hope this is sans adieu?

POPPY

[*A little huffily.*]

Thank you. Sans adieu.

OSHIMA

You will see Miss Smith again.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah—you are coming back then—sometime—maybe?

POPPY

[*With a look at OSHIMA.*]

Yes, I shall be coming back——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Craftily.*]

To-night?

OSHIMA

To-night!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Bowing to POPPY.*]

The arrangements shall be made—alors, *jusqua ce soir*, Miss Smith!

[*OSHIMA starts forward. MOTHER GOD DAMN hastily intervenes—to OSHIMA.*]

You wait with me—it is better so.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Calling from steps.*]

How soon shall we be ready?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Knowing the procrastinating habits of Mr. Wu and Mrs. Shi, I think I can chat with Prince Oshima ten or fifteen minutes.

[*POPPY exits with CÆSAR-HAWKINS L. MOTHER GOD DAMN turns to OSHIMA with narrowing eyes.*]

So!

OSHIMA

So!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Laughing.*]

So!

OSHIMA

[*Laughing.*]

So!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So! You have come back—after five years—I thought you would—water finds its level.

OSHIMA

Five years ago you brought on me great punishment.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Five years ago I found you out!

OSHIMA

I think it has troubled you—you look more thin than before.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So-o-o-e! You look more fat! Under the eyes and back of the ears you show your indulgent life—so—you are coming here to-night with this Miss Smith, eh?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

Yes.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

What is her real name, Oshima?

OSHIMA

I don't know.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

.*[Smiles.]*

Yae ye yah ye! Oshima is grand, ha, ha! Japanese honor!

OSHIMA

We leave everything in your hands—we ask you to be our godmother.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Tactful Oshima! Japanese tongue— So she lives in Shanghai, this girl—at a hotel?

OSHIMA

No, her people are residents here.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Reflectively.]

She may be some one's wife.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

You think?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No, no! She is dressed far too well for a wife—
a cocotte perhaps.

OSHIMA

What do you think?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No, much too bold—and then she——

[*Thinking.*]

—had no pearls. Is she a virgin?

OSHIMA

What would *you* say?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Decidedly.*]

I say—no!

OSHIMA

Your eyes are good. This child has disturbed me
strangely.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You, disturbed! Your passions are on the surface,

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Oshima—underneath you are cold as ice—ha, ha! I disturbed you once—even I!

[Laughs.]

Or so you said. To test that mad beguin you claimed you had for me, I set my mice on you—and when that Hawaiian girl without half trying turned you—like that!—into a panting idiot—I did not want you any more.

OSHIMA

And did your worst to me!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Your own fault, mon garçon! You exposed me to the ridicule of a person in my own business—in my own house—then I disturbed you truly in the only way you can be disturbed—I pulled you down.

OSHIMA

You had the power— I had told you a secret. . . .

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ai-ye! The secret I made you tell—and which you had no right to tell—served China and served me!

OSHIMA

And made me a wanderer.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Dear man! As a statesman of Japan, you were no good at all—as a lecher and a libertine, you have turned out very well . . . a perfect Paris Japanese. You are much better as you are, *mon garçon*—roaming about, looking for—Miss Smiths.

[*Pauses—smiles.*]

She does you credit, that little Smithy, she is chic—a little bizarre maybe—but good style. She is a lady—and white, too. How every one will envy you your conquest! An English girl and white—you know the sighing for white flesh which is the passion of every gay dog of Japan—white! White! The flesh cry of Asia!

[*Pause—laughs.*]

And you wish to bring her here to-night?

OSHIMA

[*Sullenly.*]

Yes, I do—and of course I want the best.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Slyly.*]

This is New Year's. On holidays and such occasions my rates are double, as you know.

OSHIMA

But don't forget I am a poor man now, through you!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

How you *do* talk!

OSHIMA

That mirrored suite under the dragon staircase.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

With champagne—supper—ice—flowers—service—extras—and my best embroidered, lace-trimmed linen!

OSHIMA

Used to rent for 200 Mex a night.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

In pre-war days! Not recently! But to you—
Let me see— What can I do for you——

[*She adds on her fingers.*]

to you for old times' sake—for memory's sake—for
auld lang syne—to you, my old friend, my old friend
—my martyred statesman—my discarded one—only
2,000 Mexican in advance!

[*She smiles at him with great good humor.*]

[*There is a sudden sound of wild sobbing in the
corridor left—loud voices—and the scurry
of feet.*]

[OSHIMA and MOTHER GOD DAMN turn as
CÆSAR-HAWKINS enters.]

What is this loud talk?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Some woman who says she's from Moo Chi Creek.

[*From the corridor left comes a woman's voice
—a coarse Cockney voice.*]

THE VOICE

Go on there! Shut your squawking, you dratted little cockerloo! Just wait till Mother God Damn gets hold of yer. Wot I done to yer won't be no-think. . . .

[CREEK SIDE MARY *enters, dragging NI PAU (Lost Petal) by the hand. CREEK SIDE MARY is a nightmare of a woman—foul, ragged, drunken, broken-toothed, blear-eyed, shapeless. NI PAU is delicate, fair, exquisite, though dressed in horrid rags. MARY pushes NI PAU into the room and turns on LIN CHI, the Mole, who pulls at her dress as though to stop her.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Sternly.*]

What's the meaning of this bobbery!

CREEK SIDE MARY

[*Pointing to LIN CHI.*]

'E's a-tryin' to stop me—moddom—this scum of dead cholera fish here!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

LIN CHI

Stink! Stink! She bring dirty sailor boarding house smell here—better she go back way——

CREEK SIDE MARY

Ain't you expecting me, moddom? Tell the putrid gilhicky gimmick—I'm here by your order.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Come, my woman—that's no way to talk.

[To MOTHER GOD DAMN.]

Are you expecting her? Do you know her?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, but don't let her get too near my furniture—and as you value your life, don't let her sit down!

[To OSHIMA.]

What do you think of her, Oshima?

OSHIMA

A specimen for true!

CREEK SIDE MARY

Specimen yourself! My! look at the Jap fancy boy—ain't he sweet? Ain't he refined? What's your job here—if I may be so bold to ask——

[NI PAU *suddenly begins to sob.*]

[To NI PAU.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Shut up, you slop plastered little stoat! Do you want one more licking before we part?

[*She moves threateningly at girl.*]

[*Lifting fist as though to strike her.*]

[NI PAU *cringes*, CÆSAR-HAWKINS *interferes.*]

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

None of that! None of that!

CREEK SIDE MARY

Get out of my way—you tossel-eared, pink-faced punk, you slab-sided Lizzie!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*To OSHIMA.*]

She is remarkable, isn't she?

OSHIMA

Who in heaven's name is she?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Her name is Creek Side Mary—and she keeps a low-class sea folk house in Blood Town! A very low-class sea folk house in Blood Town!

[*To NI PAU.*]

Come here, girl, I want to look at you.

[NI PAU *slowly approaches* MOTHER GOD DAMN.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Go and send the big eunuch at the gate to me.

[*To LIN CHI.*]

You have kept track of how much I owe this woman! Pay her when she goes!

[*CÆSAR-HAWKINS and LIN CHI exit and MOTHER GOD DAMN stares at NI PAU.*]

[*To OSHIMA.*]

What do you think of this girl?

OSHIMA

She is beautiful—but dirty!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Through her teeth.*]

Yes—I have kept her dirty—for a purpose.

OSHIMA

Who is she?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

She is called Ni Pau—which means Lost Petal—and she has never known a man.

[*To CREEK SIDE MARY.*]

That is if—you have kept her morals good—as I ordered you to do!

MARY

[*Protesting.*]

The time I've had keeping the boys off her—like

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

you told me!—every bloomin' navvy, napsel, and chips—every blasted pills, swipes and pipe swipes, atween here and Javyhead's bean after her—and me fightin' 'em off the little malkin' all these years!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Coldly.*]

If you lie—I shall soon find out!

[*To NI PAU.*]

No, I see nothing in your eyes—to make me think she lies——

OSHIMA

[*Putting his hand under NI PAU's chin and lifting it.*]

She has lovely eyes. . . .

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Taking his hand away.*]

Do not leer at her! And keep your hands away!

OSHIMA

Poor thing! She's frightened!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Mockingly.*]

Always the libertine! What a fellow! A moment back—Miss Smith—now you quiver for this gutter child!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

What are you doing with her?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Perhaps a New Year's gift to some one—maybe to you! Perhaps for sale to some one—maybe to you? Who knows but me?

OSHIMA

Shaka! What a woman!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Lecher! Anyway I make her the pièce de résistance to-night at my New Year's frolic!

[*With a shuddering little cry, NI PAU faints.*]

OSHIMA

She's fainted——

MARY

I'll bring her to—fast enough!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Keep your hands away. We'll have to use soap enough as it is—to get her clean!

[*Tsa the Eunuch enters. MOTHER GOD DAMN orders him in Chinese to lift NI PAU and carry*

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

her out. TSA exits, the girl slung over his shoulder, limp and seemingly lifeless.]

[*To MARY.*]

Now go. My clerk will pay you what I owe you—be careful not to soil my floors as you walk along.

[*MARY slinks off.*]

OSHIMA

So you—plan frolics for to-night, eh?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I think so. When Mr. Koo Lot Foo comes I shall know for certain—he has gone to ask, for me, my guest of honor! After which I will quickly ask the others. Yes, I will ask you too. You will sit at my left—to-night!

OSHIMA

[*Hesitatingly.*]

You forgot I've——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Oh! After dinner you may fetch Miss Smith.

OSHIMA

Oh! You give a dinner?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

That is my plan. At my table all the nabobs of

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

the foreign colony—a little bit of tip-top from each set, French and Yankee—Spanish—Swiss and Jew—and English—all here for my bondabust Karoo—also their wives!

OSHIMA

[*Astounded.*]

Their wives—will the wives come?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

If I tell them to.

OSHIMA

Shaka! What a woman! The last five years at least have seen no pulling down in you. Your nose is higher up than ever—does nothing stop you as you march along—over hands and feet and necks and heads?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So far—nothing.

OSHIMA

One day I think the gods will call to you—you'll have to listen then—you will have to answer them. Tokaido—Mother God Damn, Tokaido!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I am to beware, eh? To be afraid, eh? Of what?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Of whom? Of the gods? Whose gods? Pah! No—I am not Oshima—and I am not afraid. There are no gods at all for me—my only god is *man*!

[*Laughs.*]

OSHIMA

Why do you laugh? To me it is as though a fox were plaguing you.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I have no fox—plaguing foxes are only for Japanese.

OSHIMA

Why then are you always laughing?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Inside here——

[*Pointing to her head.*]

inside here I have a joke—a Chinese joke—my joke is wise. It tells me everything.

OSHIMA

Tell me why your shoulders always shake. It is most horrible. Tell me your joke——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

When I was very young I died—the joke came then.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA /

And to-night—the joke spells—what?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Spelling on her fingers.*]

To-night—the joke spells—C-H-A-R-T-ERIS——

OSHIMA

Charteris——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes!

OSHIMA

Guy Charteris——

[*She nods.*]

I used to know him before I went away.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

He is Sir Guy Charteris. A fine old Norman name, eh?

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Entering.*]

Pardon me—but the Mandarin Koo Lot Foo is here!

[MANDARIN KOO LOT FOO *enters from the right.*
He is a tall, imposing Chinaman with impres-

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

sive white mustaches and goatee. He is dressed most elegantly, in rich sober silks. On his head he wears the hat and peacock feather of rank and distinction. He comes toward MOTHER GOD DAMN. CÆSAR-HAWKINS withdraws.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Sharply.*]

At last!— Did your feet catch in bird glue, that it took you so long to go only from here to that Man's godown and back again?

KOO LOT FOO

New Year's crowds made progress slow.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Well, well—does he come here to-night—this man?

KOO LOT FOO

He comes!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah-h!—Ah-h!—Ha, ha!

KOO LOT FOO

[*Looking at OSHIMA.*]

Do I—perceive that Prince Oshima has returned to China?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I beg your pardon—I forget my manners.

[*To OSHIMA.*]

You know Mr. Koo Lot Foo—the ex-envoy to Russia, who was my uncle?

OSHIMA

[*Bows to Koo Lot Foo.*]

Oh, yes.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*To Koo Lot Foo, pointing to OSHIMA.*]

And you know him, don't you? The ex-attaché to Pekin from Japan—who was—my pet!

KOO LOT FOO

[*Bowing.*]

Ah, yes, I know! I remember!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Indicating Koo Lot Foo.*]

Here—my kind provider.

[*Indicating OSHIMA.*]

here my relaxation—but you were both so disappointing—so-o disappointing—you see I am particular—so particular—most particular.

[*Pointing to Koo Lot Foo.*]

Alas—you too old!

[*Pointing to OSHIMA.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

You too young! But now at last I have found a man! Such shoulders! Such arms! Such lips! Such eyes! I have set myself on fire only thinking of that man. A mind, too, to entertain my soul when he has seared me up with love——

KOO LOT FOO

I think she's mad!

OSHIMA

I think she is!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I think I am!—Yes, in that man is everything I missed in both of you!

[OSHIMA *laughs sardonically* and Koo Lot Foo *coughs.*]

KOO LOT FOO

At all events—in my opinion he is vain—your man—he took your invitation as a tribute to himself. It pleased him much.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Tell me—close to—is his skin good—is his smell good?

KOO LOT FOO

[*Aghast.*]

But how can I tell that?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Of course! Of course! That is sex—only a woman could know that. But his eyes—**HIS EYES!** Well, never in my life have I seen eyes so blue as his— Oh, I am mad! Mad to meet this man!

KOO LOT FOO

But he——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Is mad to meet *me*, too.

KOO LOT FOO

As usual you presume much.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

As usual I am right. For years he has followed me about—tried to meet me—everywhere—first in Russia——

[*Pauses.*]

Dear old fool—you did not know that, eh?

KOO LOT FOO

I did not know that.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

There were many other things you did not know, my uncle.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

KOO LOT FOO

Of that I am aware.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

But, let that pass. Then after I came back to China, the moth still flew about this flame. But this flame blew cold. And his desire grew. Ha, ha! To hurry things is childish. Occidental! Most unwise!— Delayed delights are sweetest—is that not so, Oshima?

OSHIMA

Ah, you plan much sweetness for to-night!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, to-night, at last, I allow my jumping heart to let him come.

KOO LOT FOO

It all sounds very vague to me.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Let me see. Dinner is at nine. I want no slip-up in his coming—now. Foo Foo, you shall take my big Francini car—go to his house at half past eight and fetch him here yourself.

KOO LOT FOO

[*Dryly.*]

Has this Sir Guy Charteris no legs?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Beautiful legs!

KOO LOT FOO

Have no fear! He will come. He is too much flattered not to!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, but I wish him here a little early!

KOO LOT FOO

Before the others?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes!

[She rings a gong.]

KOO LOT FOO

Just as you say.

OSHIMA

So—! —So it is that Charteris who causes this big disturbance—eh?

KOO LOT FOO

I know she's mad.

OSHIMA

I know she is.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I know I am!

KOO LOT FOO

[*Sighing.*]

I do not understand this dinner-giving—or this asking here of British taipans—but experience has taught me to make no demur—when *this* mind here is set.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Regarding Koo Lot Foo with ironic amusement.*]

So! For you to-night I ask Donna Querebro D'Achuna—the lady from Bolivia—with big busts—who at the moment gets your jade.

KOO LOT FOO

[*Frightened.*]

You have not asked her!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Aye—and her husband, too—so you should go home and rest!

[*CÆSAR-HAWKINS enters in response to the gong.*]

[*Crossing to table and picking up invitations.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

These invitations!— Send them off at once!
Tell the coolies to run—to break their necks——

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Taking invitations.*]

Yes, Madame——!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And bid the cooks begin their work according to
the orders I have given!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Yes, Madame——

[*He exits.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*In high good humor.*]

For the table, my best lace point de Venise—the
great Ming candle sticks!—and about the dining
room my turquoise perfume burners! Each one
breathing out the smell of Ambre!

[*Off stage barking of dogs.*]

[*MOTHER GOD DAMN stops.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Hear them—my pets, Mr. Wu and Mrs. Shi—the
darlings! Yes, yes, I come, I come. They are
anxious to see the plum blossoms before the sun

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

slants and the view is spoiled. Tsa! Tsa! We shall be late, I fear. Come, let us be off.

[*To Koo Lot Foo.*]

Don't look so sorry for yourself. A nice siesta will freshen you—to cope with that D'Achuna woman when she starts hinting for more jade.

[*To OSHIMA.*]

And you—don't look so cross! Where is your arm! I have told you—after dinner you may fetch Miss Smith.

[*During the foregoing the chauffeur has appeared with elaborate rugs over his arm and LIN CHI has entered with a parrot in a cage, followed by another servant carrying a monkey and a tea-basket. MOTHER GOD DAMN looks them over, nods and starts off.*]

Yes—we are all here.

[*To OSHIMA and Koo Lot Foo.*]

Come, I will drop you—as I drive along.

[*MOTHER GOD DAMN exits followed by OSHIMA, whose arm she takes, Koo Lot Foo and the procession of servants.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

"The Grand Red Hall of Lily and Lotus Roots."

A lofty and sumptuous dining hall, panelled in carved red lacquer. A stairway of red lacquer descends from a latticed gallery, stretching across the back of the stage. This gallery is entered by a little curtained door at the right. The staircase curves off from the gallery and faces the audience, left. On the main level there are two arched entrances—one on the right, the other on the left. Both these entrances are heavily curtained in red brocade. At the back a wide high window gives out upon the garden below. When the act starts, the window is curtained. Later in the act when the curtains are drawn, the tops of many blooming plum trees can be seen, shimmering under a misty moon. In the center of the room stands a table magnificently set for dinner—European fashion. Lacquer chairs of red and gold are placed for twelve people. The table sparkles with gold and crystal, flanked by tall gold candelabra. It is decorated with lotus lilies. Elsewhere in the room are great vases of priceless

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

porcelain, rare blooming plants in exquisite pots, growing shrubs on beautiful standards and bowls of cut flowers. On all sides perfume burners trail delicate threads of sweet smoke.

A gong sounds. The curtains at the right are parted and KOO LOT FOO and SIR GUY CHARTERIS are ushered in by a white-robed houseboy. CHARTERIS is a tall, distinguished Englishman, in his middle forties, immaculate in appearance, with great charm of manner. He is graceful, easy, polished and not altogether unaware of it. He stares about him, losing his eyeglass, in amazement at the loveliness of the room. KOO LOT FOO gives an order in Chinese to the servant, who withdraws.]

CHARTERIS

I say—what a marvelous room!

KOO LOT FOO

It is a copy of the private dining hall of the late Empress Dowager at the summer palace. When the Empress heard about it she burst a blood vessel and the unhappy architect was executed.

[Boy enters with champagne on tray and places it on stand, left.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

It's magnificent! Overwhelming!

[*Examining the incense burners.*]

What gorgeous incense things these are!

KOO LOT FOO

[*Pouring out champagne.*]

Yes—Mother God Damn treasures those very greatly. She uses them to-night—in your honor!

CHARTERIS

These things burning in my honor—I say!

[CHARTERIS *tastes the wine; amazed and delighted.*]

This attention bewilders me!

KOO LOT FOO

She is a most peculiar woman. When she likes she likes. When she hates she hates.

CHARTERIS

She interests me tremendously. One hears such devilishly strange things about her. She's a potentate. She makes and unmakes people as she likes—she makes and squashes deals.

KOO LOT FOO

She does as she damn pleases.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

And no one can stop her. You're an old friend,
I take it.

KOO LOT FOO

Very old—her first—as you are probably aware.
Hm! Hm!

CHARTERIS

Tell me—where does she get her power with the
police—and the government?

KOO LOT FOO

She knows the secrets of all China. She also
knows the tongue is an axe for the neck. But never
in her life has she parted with a secret for the joy of
telling. That is why she is necessary to the govern-
ment. That is why the police use her—protect her
—and dread her!

CHARTERIS

I've tried to meet her for years. Recently I wrote
her. I hoped to reach a certain governor through
her. She took no notice but yesterday our cars
came plumb together on the Wang Po bridge. . . .
She nearly bumped me off the damn thing . . . and
laughed! . . . Last night at the opera she laughed
at me again.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

KOO LOT FOO

So! So? She has always seemed to me a most serious woman!

CHARTERIS

Yet to-night she asks me here! I hardly know what to make of it.

KOO LOT FOO

[*Slyly.*]

You—assume—she fancies you?

CHARTERIS

I hope she does.

KOO LOT FOO

Of course—with her—one can never tell!

CHARTERIS

Anyway—I'm no end grateful—for fetching me. Thanks a lot, old top!

[*He slaps Koo Lot Foo on the back.*]

KOO LOT FOO

[*Catching his breath.*]

You are welcome!

[CHARTERIS moves away left, examining the room.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

[*The curtains of the little door on the gallery part and MOTHER GOD DAMN peeps out. She draws the curtains back and comes forth cautiously. She is a startling picture of magnificence. Her dress of fabulous brocade is heavily encrusted with pearls. She wears a collar and a breastplate of emerald jade. She wears a head-dress of jade and rubies. Diamonds hang from her ears and sparkle in long chains around her neck and in great ornaments pinned on her dress. Her hands are heavy with them. For a moment she stands listening, then hearing no sound she tiptoes to the gallery rail and leans over. Not seeing CHARTERIS, who is out of her range of vision, she calls down to Koo Lot Foo.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Leaning over the gallery.*]

Uncle Koo Lot Foo Uncle Koo Lot Foo! Uncle Koo Lot Foo—oo——

[*She breaks into Chinese as though berating him for not bringing CHARTERIS.*]

Where is he—didn't he come?

[*She starts to descend.*]

KOO LOT FOO

[*In a weary voice, in Chinese, "He is here." He indicates CHARTERIS.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Oh!

[She straightens her dress, assumes an elegant manner and continues to descend. CHARTERIS ascends a few steps to meet her.]

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome—Sir Guy Charteris—to my house!

CHARTERIS

It is a far greater pleasure for Guy Charteris *at last* to be welcomed by . . .

[He hesitates.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Mother God Damn is the name. You fear to say it?

CHARTERIS

Hitherto——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

We have only smiled—with half our faces.

CHARTERIS

And now. . . .

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Now you kiss my hand!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

Now I kiss your hand! What charming little hands you have.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You think so? You, too, have charming hands, so big and strong. I think that we shall like each other—eh?

CHARTERIS

I do not think——

[*Leans over again to kiss her hand.*]

I *know* we shall. . . .

[MOTHER GOD DAMN *signals to Koo Lot Foo, who exits.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

A third head knocks, eh? When two heads wish to wag. . . .

CHARTERIS

So you at last decide that we shall meet?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I am a patient woman.

CHARTERIS

For years I've tried to meet you! You've avoided me like a bit of mercury—a puff of smoke.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Indeed! Indeed!

CHARTERIS

We pass in public—I stare at you—you will not see me— Even yesterday when our motors crashed and almost sent us both to Kingdom Come, you looked straight through me—past me—over that damned big muff you carry—and you laughed!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

A small Chinese woman laugh at the great English sportsman? Sha! Sha!

CHARTERIS

You have a way of laughing—laughing out at nothing—into the air—every time you see me. Why?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

When people stare—I laugh; why do you stare?

CHARTERIS

You puzzle me—try as I will, I have never been able to catch your eye.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Going towards him.*]

Through one side eye, however—I have looked at you enough—to ascertain your eyes are blue—most

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

blue—completely blue— Let me look at them again
—Yes, yes, they are just as blue, too, as far away.

CHARTERIS

You know you have a way of coming on me suddenly, in the oddest places, in the oddest way.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Laughing.*]

I pop out at you, as you English say.

CHARTERIS

Yes.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah-h! Far up in the hills in Cantze—you remember that?

CHARTERIS

Do I—yes! I was stalking deer—I jumped just in time as you came plunging past.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

On my great black stallion, Nero. Was he not magnificent—that animal?

CHARTERIS

And as I lay sprawling in the mud, you looked back at me and laughed.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I could not help it. You looked so queer! You, the great and dashing widower, whom all the fashionable Shanghai ladies so madly love! sprawling in the mud! Ah, c'est drôle ça!

[*Laughs.*]

CHARTERIS

Very droll!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

These social strumpets I do not like! They spoil my trade—you see, they *give* away the wares I have to sell——

CHARTERIS

Ho! Ho! [*He roars with laughter.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Oh, I have watched you— How does your system stand the strain of constantly obliging—you must be very virile!

CHARTERIS

You see too much with those side eyes of yours.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Umph! But tell me where did your full eyes

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

first see me? Do tell me! First meetings are so sweet!

CHARTERIS

In Russia.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*In an odd voice.*]

Ah! So, so!

CHARTERIS

You were the Chinese Lily—one might as well have tried to meet the Queen.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Mockingly.*]

In Russia—yes, I was very hard to meet. I went to most exalted sets—Grand Dukes—Chancellors—Prime Ministers . . .

CHARTERIS

. . . hung round you like flies to jam pots!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Some thought me an angel—some a rogue—some a snake—a curse—a poem—even a prayer. Ha,

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

ha! Think of that—a prayer—a rare prayer, I would make.

[She laughs; he laughs with her.]

CHARTERIS

I see many things in you, but not a prayer.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And then that horrid scandal had to come—that Koo Lot Foo was not my uncle—but my—hum!

[Puts hand over her eyes—pauses—sighs.]

What a wicked world it is!

CHARTERIS

Well, as far as I can see, this wicked world has handed you—what and all you want—from Shanghai to St. Petersburg.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

St. Petersburg—of all Europe I love the best. It is like a great savage cat, switching its tail, singing in its throat—watching for its kill!

CHARTERIS

Ha, ha! You like savage things—and killings, eh?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes. And you—are fierce and ruthless too, eh?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

There's a strain of Celt in me, which wars with all my English—and tears me into bits.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So-o—you have a savage in you, too?

CHARTERIS

It makes me—want to take you—know you! You are going to let me, aren't you?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Well, to-night, if you are good—you shall. . . .

CHARTERIS

[Misunderstanding, going quickly to her.]

Yes, yes!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Meet my cat.

CHARTERIS

Your cat? Pah!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

The cat is my emblem—years ago I took from Uncle Koo Lot Foo a great cat of solid gold—a crouching, hungry cat. It is in my private sleeping quarters. It has its paw out—so. It guards my

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

bed—my virtue. I may show it to you later—nous
nous verrons!

CHARTERIS

[Moves to her, impulsively.]

Let me see it now. Why must I wait?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Smiling.]

Aha! Like myself—you take what you wish to
take, sans ceremonie, eh? No law! No code! Brig-
and and bandit both!

CHARTERIS

Laugh—that's right! Are you as cold as that
laugh you laugh?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, I am—cold—as the home of the Winter
seal——

CHARTERIS

[Coming to her.]

What do you hide behind that mask you wear?
Come, let me pull it off.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Brutal man!

[They look at each other.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

You move, walk, talk, smile; your talk says nothing; your smile says nothing. I wonder if you can feel. . . . Do you feel at all?

[Coming to her.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Backing away.]

Do you? If so, you are the first Englishman I ever met who does.

CHARTERIS

[Backing away.]

Have you asked me here—for nothing?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Shaking her head.]

No—no more than you have come for nothing!

CHARTERIS

Have you lovers? Tell me.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

None—none at all.

CHARTERIS

[Incredulously.]

No—love-life?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

None! None at all. I am quite unattached; mine is a tedious life.

CHARTERIS

[*Boldly.*]

Let me relieve the tedium. Do you ever smile such invitations?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Smiling.*]

Sometimes—perhaps—on New Year's. I am smiling now—at you.

CHARTERIS

I want to be your lover.

[*He takes her hand—smiling—assured of his conquest.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Moving away.*]

Shall I tell you why—you make this love to me?

CHARTERIS

Good God, woman, haven't I been telling you—you have kindled my maddest curiosity—loosened all my wits.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No—it is because each male must try his wiles one time at least on me; to satisfy his ego.

CHARTERIS

What do you mean?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*With malicious amusement.*]

Each man would be a charmer—a great seducer—and what greater test of charm than to crack the hard shell of the brothel mistress—the bold and brassy one—who counts the money but is not for sale.

CHARTERIS

[*Huffily.*]

You have my reason—wrong!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Smiling.*]

You are quite sure you do not wish to preen yourself and say, “Ah, Guy, you striking fellow, you have turned that greedy Mother God Damn hawk into a cooing dove.”

CHARTERIS

You are going to let me be your lover?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

What! You wish to put me on your staff of ladies!
I am to be the Chinese member of your varied harem?

CHARTERIS

Haven't you eyes? Instinct? Can't you see—
you have driven me quite mad?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah, you wish to change the color of your love-life,
eh? You feel you need a yellow note. And I must
have a white note to relieve my tedium. You wish
to mix the colors up and see what happens?

CHARTERIS

Don't you think the time has come to stop our
nonsense?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You have reached a dangerous age, my man; your
sex is shaky—you must have new excitements for
your appetite, which hitherto has been so British.

CHARTERIS

You forget . . . I am Celtic—too.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And you are bored with sofa lyings with the easy

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

wives of Shanghai friends. You should meet—my mice.

CHARTERIS

Damn your mice!

MOTHER GOD DAMN .

But some of them are also great celebrities.

CHARTERIS

It is you I want—and only you—this moment!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You wish that I shall make a new convenience for your changing mood, eh?

CHARTERIS

Yes.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Show you new, unholy and most strange delights?

CHARTERIS

Yes!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

But I am not Astoreth—that goddess with a question mark, whom Solomon always chased for relaxation.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

[*Laughing.*]

Solomon knew a woman and so do I—by God—

MOTHER GOD DAMN

He sings me the song of songs!

CHARTERIS

That black magician's smile of yours has aroused the infernal demons in me.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

That Hebrew song from English lips should make a Chinese woman very versatile. That is what you hope?

CHARTERIS

Yes, and you are going to give me what and all I ask.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

The Taipan asks a rendezvous d'amour with Mother God Damn?

CHARTERIS

No, I take one!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Shanghai's great English hero! Shanghai's great

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Chinese whore! Now it has a Greek sound—not a Jewish sound. Like Aspasia and Alexander— Ah!
[*She cups her hand to her ear.*]

CHARTERIS

What do you pretend you hear?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

The rush of two big storms—one from the East—one from the West—racing up from inferno to a meeting.

CHARTERIS

Good! I hear them coming, too—faster and faster—hurrying to some witches' Sabbath—our consummation!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

To-night we dip into the darkness, eh?

CHARTERIS

Yes—to find our devils!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

My foxes, your badgers; my wolves, your dogs; my wasps, your spiders; my wild cats, your swine; we start all the insects, all the animals in both of us—fighting, howling, snarling, in this black night you plan!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

Yes, we shall be two wicked persons—afraid of nothing.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Hm! You are a very wicked person—there is no doubt of that! But I am wondering if you are completely so!

CHARTERIS

You must find that out—when is it to be?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Let me think.

CHARTERIS

Don't think—feel for once.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ha, for once?—You think that . . .?

CHARTERIS

How can I tell until you show me; when do we meet alone?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Go away! Go away!

CHARTERIS

When? When?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I have many guests and a dinner party.

CHARTERIS

Damn your guests, and damn your dinners! Tell me when!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

After dinner.

CHARTERIS

You promise?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I promise.

[*She pauses.*]

CHARTERIS

You'll not change your mind?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I promise that—if after dinner you still clamor for this Walpurgis Nacht with me.

CHARTERIS

Yes——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

If you have not changed your mood by then.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

I will not change my mood.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You may come to my private quarters by the back entrance to my house.

CHARTERIS

The back entrance, eh?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And I will make for you such madness—show you such astonishments . . .

CHARTERIS

Ha!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Such outrageousness—such excitements—fantas-tiques—that . . .

CHARTERIS

That what?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You may be sorry I no longer wear my mask.

CHARTERIS

You think so, eh?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I know so. . . Are you not afraid?

CHARTERIS

[*Jeeringly.*]

Of what?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Of me!

CHARTERIS

Of you?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

That I will lose for you your Saxon soul?

CHARTERIS

To-night I'll risk—your Chinese spells.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Good—now may I receive my guests, my lord?

[*She strikes a gong.*]

CHARTERIS

Damn your guests—I don't want to see them.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah, but you must.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

Who are they?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Maliciously.*]

Just people you are used to meeting. People in your own high set. I wished you to feel at home to-night.

[*She laughs at his discomfited expression. The houseboys appear and begin to pull back the curtains at door left. CÆSAR-HAWKINS enters and stands just inside the door. MOTHER GOD DAMN crosses and stands on the other side of the door. CHARTERIS moves to the left, frowning.*]

CHARTERIS

You promise—after dinner?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

After dinner—I promise.

[*Soft music begins to play.*]

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Announcing.*]

Sir John and Lady Blessington!

[*MOTHER GOD DAMN grimaces at CHARTERIS as SIR JOHN and LADY BLESSINGTON enter.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

They are an elderly and extremely dignified English couple—he, pink-faced, portly, bland—she, portly also, and dowdily impressive.

CHARTERIS

What the devil!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Bowing.*]

I am honored to have the port Judge of Shanghai—in my house.

SIR JOHN

May I present—Lady Blessington?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

To meet the wives of old friends—is always pleasant.

LADY BLESSINGTON

[*In an icy voice.*]

The plum blossoms in your garden are very beautiful.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah! You like? You like?

[*She gives an order in Chinese, indicating the curtained window at the back.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

I will have the curtains parted now—so we can see them.

[*She gestures towards CHARTERIS.*]

Of course—you know each other.

LADY BLESSINGTON

[*Crossing to CHARTERIS.*]

Sir Guy! This is an evening of surprises!

[*MOTHER GOD DAMN gives SIR JOHN a meaning look—she crosses to the window to superintend its raising—giving Chinese orders.*]

CHARTERIS

[*To LADY BLESSINGTON.*]

Whatever brings you here?

LADY BLESSINGTON

Do you think—it's quite safe? John insisted and I had to come. I haven't any idea—why.

[*The window is now raised, revealing the tops of the plum trees shimmering in the moonlight.*]

[*LADY BLESSINGTON and CHARTERIS cross to the window. MOTHER GOD DAMN crosses to SIR JOHN, who has been standing by himself.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*To SIR JOHN.*]

Wise man to come and bring your wife! See that

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

at dinner when my—er—frolics are at their best—you remain wise.

SIR JOHN

[*Alarmed.*]

What do you mean?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Grimly.*]

If you find my entertainment gruesome—if it offends—restrain yourself. Do not go—do not let the others go. I warn you! You understand, I'm sure!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Announcing from door.*]

Monsieur le Conte de Michot and Madame la Comtesse.

[MONS. LE COMTE DE MICHOT AND MME. LA COMTESSE enter. *They are a French couple of extremely rich and fastidious appearance—he, bewhiskered à la Louis Napoleon—she, somewhat small, mouselike and malicious—but very smartly dressed.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Crossing to them.*]

Hola, De Michot! Entrez et soyes bien!

[DE MICHOT introduces his wife.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Long have I wished to greet the magnificent wife of the big Number One of the Bank of Europe-Asia!

MME. LA COMTESSE

[Insincerely.]

Thank you.

[She notices LADY BLESSINGTON—and evinces great surprise.]

There is Lady Blessington!

[She laughs nervously.]

How most unexpected——

[She crosses to LADY BLESSINGTON, who comes upstage to meet her.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Smiling wickedly at their embarrassed surprise.]

A nice surprise, eh? To find your old friends. I am the only stranger—present.

[She moves toward CÉSAR-HAWKINS.]

LADY BLESSINGTON

[To MME. DE MICHOT.]

What brings you here?

MME. LA COMTESSE

[Shrugging.]

Pierre insisted. I came!

[They laugh to cover their embarrassment.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

SIR JOHN *joins* CHARTERIS, *and the two stand, likewise embarrassed and ill at ease.*]

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Announcing.*]

Mr. and Mrs. Dudley Gregory.

[MR. and MRS. GREGORY *enter. Both are Americans, he, youngish and alert; she, extremely fashionable and pretty.*]

[*There is a burst of rockets and fire flowers outside.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah! Dudley! Dudley! This is your pretty wife?

MRS. GREGORY

Your house is wonderful, just like the Arabian Nights. I so admire it.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So-o? I so admire your husband—he is young—to be the head of a great house like—United Oil.

GREGORY

[*Pointing to fireworks.*]

See. Timed for your coming—Carrie!

MRS. GREGORY

Perfectly lovely of her—isn't it?

[*She runs ecstatically to window.* MOTHER

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

GOD DAMN *follows, her hand on GREGORY'S arm.*]

DE MICHOT

[*To SIR JOHN*]

What do you make of all this? She seems to have asked the heads of all the biggest firms in Shanghai—What do you make of it?

BLESSINGTON

Nothing. Why?

DE MICHOT

For me—I'm past making.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Announcing.*]

The Don and Donna Querebro D'Achuna—and Mr. Koo Lot Foo.

[*MOTHER GOD DAMN crosses from the window to the door. The GREGORYS come upstage.*]

MRS. GREGORY

[*In a tense whisper to the other ladies.*]

The Bolivian Minister's wife—and that Chinaman—who keeps her.

[*The DON AND the DONNA QUEREbro D'ACHUNA enter. He, tall and foreign-look-*

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

ing, many orders across his shirt front; she, bold, handsome, dashing, darkly splendid—wearing a Parisian frock and much jade.]

[After them, comes Koo Lot Foo, looking sad and resigned.]

DONNA D'ACHUNA

[Gushingly, but with meaning.]

Ah, Mother God Damn! I know you by sight, of course—who doesn't!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Replying in Spanish.]

[Pauses—meaningly.]

Pardon! I forget. It is your husband who is Spanish, not you. You are only Cosmopolitan.

DONNA D'ACHUNA

[Her eyes narrowing.]

Er—! What do you mean——! Exactly what do you mean by that?

DON QUEREBO

[Hastily—a restraining hand on his wife's arm.]

Are we late? We could not resist lingering to watch the balloons—and your dancing jugglers.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[Announcing.]

Prince Oshima.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Turning.*]

The lost one! The late one! Anata taihen waira!
kidomo ne? Don and Donna Querebro D'Achuna!
The Prince Oshima.

DONNA D'ACHUNA

[*On guard.*]

You've missed all the enchanting celebrations—
that have been happening in the garden.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Those are nothing. At dinner I have for you a
great folie—a novelty—a pièce de résistance quelle
superbe——!

OSHIMA

Ah—the little one, eh—with the eyes?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Sh! Do not spoil my big surprise— Now we
are all here——

[*She turns, crossing to the other guests.*]

[*To BLESSINGTON.*]

Sir John, will you take Mme. la Comtesse de
Michot—and you, De Michot—Lady Blessington—
and D'Achuna, Mrs. Gregory—and Donna

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

D'Achuna, *of course*, for Uncle Koo Lot Foo—but the names are at places.

[*Crosses to* CHARTERIS.]

And, you, for your sins, must fall to me.

CHARTERIS

[*Sulkily.*]

Quite so. May my sins always fall on me in such a happy fashion.

[*Sotto voce.*]

Why the deuce have you asked all these bores—I wanted you alone!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Sh! After dinner—darling—after dinner.

[*At this interchange—looks are exchanged between the guests.*]

DE MICHOT

[*Nudging* BLESSINGTON.]

Is Charteris losing his head?

[*The Guests take their places. MOTHER GOD DAMN signals them to sit. She stands, lifts a chalice to her lips.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Kia moken—moken Kia Kowachon—the greetings of the New Year and welcome to my house.

[*She sets the chalice down and sits. CÆSAR-*

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

HAWKINS approaches, places an overthrow about her shoulders. She smiles at him.]

Thank you, Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins. My major-domo, my second self. My guests!

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS signals to the servants to serve. Three "boys" start passing caviar on ice.]

[MOTHER GOD DAMN continues generally.]

You know, this is Chinese New Year's—the day of paying debts in China—big or little—great or small—you pay yours.

[Directly to CHARTERIS.]

I pay mine—I to you—you to me.

CHARTERIS

Mine to you? Surely there is no outstanding debt between us, is there?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No?

CHARTERIS

If—I—if—there—*should be*—tell me.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Laughing.]

Oh, you English! I used you only for the figure

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

of my speech. For years I've owed a debt—to-night I pay it. That is all.

DONNA D'ACHUNA

[*Leaning across table and speaking to* CHAR-
TERIS.]

I saw you driving to-day with your lovely daughter, Sir Guy.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You have a daughter?

CHARTERIS

I have.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Had I known I should have asked her here to-night.

LADY BLESSINGTON

[*Sighing.*]

She is very lovely. How proud her mother would have been of her!

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

[*Hastily.*]

Gad, Charteris—time races—doesn't it? It seems only yesterday you were a keen-eyed sporting

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

youngster—just out from home—the youngest clerk in the British China Trading Company.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Incredulously.*]

This great man—only a callow clerk?

CHARTERIS

Very callow.

BLESSINGTON

A good-looking lad he was, eh, Emily?

LADY BLESSINGTON

Exceedingly——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You are still good-looking, in my opinion, a very handsome man, Guy.

[DONNA D'ACHUNA *laughs shrilly.* GUESTS *nudge each other.* CHARTERIS *looks flustered and* MOTHER GOD DAMN *fans herself imperturbably and continues.*]

But to become an overlord—entirely by oneself—let us all drink to such ability.

CHARTERIS

No—no—I can't claim that credit—I had help, but—let's talk of some one else——!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Interrupting.*]

No, no. Tell me! I wish to hear——!

CHARTERIS

I think every one in Shanghai knows that an unmarried sister of my mother's died in England—left me her money—with that I bought my way into the firm.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And to-day he is—Number One. So to this aunt, then, whose money gave this lad his chance—we must drink! —Her name?

CHARTERIS

Aunt Jessica—her name was.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Enigmatically.*]

Aunt Jessica—what a funny name!

[*Drinks.*]

May Buddha rest her maiden soul!

MRS. GREGORY

[*To MOTHER GOD DAMN.*]

Your English is really most extraordinary!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MME. DE MICHOT

How did you learn it?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

From people who crossed my path—while they tarried I absorbed it. When they passed along—I kept it.

OSHIMA

It is not English only that she speaks.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So des ne Oshima San! Yes, thanks to you, my Japanese is fair. Arigato goziamasu!

OSHIMA

Her other tongues are many too.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

For my good French letter “r”—I thank De Michot.

MME. DE MICHOT

[*To DE MICHOT.*]

You were this lady’s pedagogue?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

My pedagogue!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MME. DE MICHOT

Ma foi! I never knew my husband was such a kindly man!

[She laughs nastily.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Continuing unruffled.]

—For that lingua dolce—that Spanish tongue—I must thank Don Querebro—over there——

[Pointing.]

—glittering with many orders——

DON QUEREBRO

[Hastily.]

No need—no need—no need—to thank—me——!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

The trusting husband of the lady who now is pinching Mr. Koo Lot Foo—that uncle who began my travels and presented me with Russian!

[Pauses, laughs.]

Do not let her pinch you, Koo Lot Foo—you know your skin is tender!

LADY BLESSINGTON

What a Mad Hatter's dinner!

[There is an awkward pause.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

DONNA D'ACHUNA

[Counting maliciously.]

Eighteen—nineteen—twenty! No one has spoken for twenty seconds—a goose has walked over all our graves!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Twelve geese! Twelve graves somewhere. A quaint thought, Donna Querebro D'Achuna.

[To CHARTERIS.]

A quaint thought, eh, Taipan Charteris?

[She laughs—looking straight into his eyes.]

CHARTERIS

[Lightly.]

That's the very look—the very laugh you had last at the opera.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Promptly.]

Madame Butterfly!

[To CHARTERIS.]

The girl was a half wit! Imagine an Asiatic woman, killing herself for one of you—handsome dogs!—

[To OSHIMA.]

A Japanese, perhaps, but not a Chinese woman.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

Mother God Damn is a Manchu—her race
breeds——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Warriors!— When we do battle—we fight to
kill!

CHARTERIS

Brava! No bound feet in your house, eh?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Boastfully.*]

Nor oil on our women's breasts, nor ever was there
the slime of fear on any sire or dam of that proud
Northern house I came from—not since the great
Khan rode out of the West and conquered China——

CHARTERIS

[*Delighted.*]

Ha, ha, ha! That's the talk! Brava! Brava!
Bravissima!

[*The guests nudge one another.*]

OSHIMA

Banzai—this silly Butterfly of Japan—makes
her very angry.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes. A man forsakes her and she kills herself. That is not the Chinese woman's way—ah, no!

CHARTERIS

What is the Chinese woman's way?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Amiably.*]

She would wait, I think for many, many years if need be—until her teeth dropped out—but in the end, if need be—she would eat his heart—with her empty gums—and drink his blood!

CHARTERIS

[*Under his breath.*]

Mother savage!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Eeye—All things inside her might go by the lingering death—the slicing process—a little bit cut off each day—the place left raw to be sliced again next day—honor—faith—hope—but these things alone would die—not the woman!

[*The guests move uneasily—there is a moment's silence. CHARTERIS regards MOTHER GOD DAMN with a puzzled look. She smiles at him.*]

What is your opinion, Taipan Charteris?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

I am not an authority on Chinese women.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

C'est drôle ça!— And you have lived in China many years——

CHARTERIS

Nearly thirty—but we English have a way of fetching England with us when we come.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You English!—so self-satisfied—so en regle—so afraid of everything not English.

CHARTERIS

Yes—we live out here much as we would in Kensington.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes—! And so after all these years—you know nothing of Chinese ways—and Chinese women?

CHARTERIS

To-night, of course, I have met you!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, to-night you have met me.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

And that alters everything.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Merci—merci—but until you saw me first you had no interest either in our ways or women——

CHARTERIS

I have scratched no Chinese surface until now.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And never a real Chinese woman came your way to meet and know—till now——

CHARTERIS

Never—I repeat I have never known a Chinese woman until to-night——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You do surprise me, Guy. No one in any class has come your way?

CHARTERIS

Oh—I've known chance chattings with pretty village wenches—and tea house girls—but never a Chinese woman of the least importance have I known—until to-night——!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

DONNA D'ACHUNA

[*Wickedly.*]

Never—even in your younger days—an establishment—à la Pierre Loti?

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

[*In alarm.*]

Who counts such! The singsong girl serves her purpose—to pass the time—then passes along when the man breaks off——!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And her *chirmini*!—pauvre papillon—what of her?

CHARTERIS

It's traditional, I believe, that she's paid off—is forgotten and—forgets—and takes off with some one else——!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I see you do not lie! You do not know our women!

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

[*Becoming more and more anxious.*]

For myself I have never seen the need in mixing up in Chinese life—we have our homes—our clubs—our sports!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Becoming angered.*] .

Your sports—your fine kind sports—to chase the panting fox with angry dogs—hold up its tail—and think you have a trophy.

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

Eh—eh?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

To run the wretched otter to his hole with snarling hounds and when they bite his insides out, cry out: Hurrah! Hurrah!—Great sportsmen! Jolly Britons—even though you live in dark and heathen China!

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

[*Startled.*]

Really, my dear woman——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Almost to herself.*]

I hate you English—a ruthless race!

CHARTERIS

What's that? What's that?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Be careful, Englishmen, be careful. You exploit

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

and rob—and China lets you! you civilize and China laughs!—you condemn our faiths—revile our creeds—detest our skins and China says “Maskee”— You soil, degrade and leave our women—and you shout “Hola”——

[A murmur from the table.]

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

[Hastily.]

No! No!—She’s merely baiting us!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Through her teeth—her eyes flashing.]

But my sons of great Britannia—my ruddy Una’s lions—don’t forget that all events march westward to the sun—and one day—you may stand in our way as we come!—Tokaido! Tokaido!

[She pauses—the guests, now a little frightened look from one to the other.]

CHARTERIS

[Surprised—angry—but still restrained.]

Just how do you wish us to take that—Mother God Damn?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You must take it—any way you like!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

I choose to think she's baiting us—having a bit of fun—am I right?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Signaling to a servant.*]

To-night my comic spirit runs fast along—the last G string!

[*Servant approaches—low words pass—the servant exits hastily. She turns, brightly.*]

Ah! My pièce de résistance now!

[*To guests.*]

Now you shall see China.

[*To CHARTERIS.*]

Now I will show you all a Chinese woman!

There is a burst of fireworks outside—a beating of gongs—a babble of rough Chinese voices. The guests start.

Aha! Here are the junkmen.

[*Six ferocious piratical-looking Boatmen enter.*

They are filthy, half-naked fellows with tattered rags for clothes—scarred faces—some of them covered with sores. They grin and gesticulate—MOTHER GOD DAMN holds up her hand for silence.]

The junkmen! They are richer than you think.

[*LADY BLESSINGTON gives a little cry.*]

And they are as gentle as they look.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

[*To* LADY BLESSINGTON.]

Don't be frightened, Emily, it's only an entertainment.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

For your amusement—turn your chair a little.

MME. DE MICHOT

Pierre, votre mouchoir!

[*DE MICHOT hands her a handkerchief; she puts it to her nose.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Perfume! Perfume! Perfume! Cæsar-Hawkins! Musk and patchouli. The noses here are delicate.

DONNA D'ACHUNA

[*As the servants spray the room.*]

[*Holding her nose.*]

Ugh! Musk and patchouli! Dreadful! I prefer junkmen!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Of course. *You* would, my dear.

[*To* CHARTERIS.]

Sit a little closer, Guy.

[*She gives an order in Chinese. Lights go out,*

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

plunging the room in total darkness. There is apprehensive laughter from guests. Out of the darkness MOTHER GOD DAMN's voice, sardonic, derisive.]

I have invited many ghosts to-night—Sh! Do you see them coming in their winding sheets. . . .

[A faint bluish tinge creeps over the blackness.

One of the women guests cries out.]

Sh—sh!—Do not frighten them—do not disturb their souls—or they may stumble—and be afraid—and miss the way!

[Some woman cries "Oh!"]

See! See! my father—and my mother— My father with his warrior shield—my mother with her wedding head-dress on—how gallantly they come along! But they do not look at me or smile—they have not—in many years.

[A moment passes, then a light appears—a reddish purple spot—which reveals a dragon pedestal holding a large tray with a fantastic cover, which has been noiselessly pushed as near to the center of the room as is possible. The rest of the room is still in darkness. TSA, the Eunuch, is standing back of the pedestal, his hands resting on the cover of the tray.

MOTHER GOD DAMN gives an order in Chinese.

TSA slowly lifts the cover from the tray re-

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

vealing a crouching girl—little NI PAU (Lost Petal) who clutches her long golden hair about her; on her face a look of frozen horror.]

[The guests at the table cry out and MOTHER GOD DAMN gives a laugh and claps her hands. The lights go back as before. She gives another order in Chinese.]

DONNA D'ACHUNA

How spectacular!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I am spectacular and full of tricks!

[To CÆSAR-HAWKINS.]

Cæsar-Hawkins! Champagne! Champagne! Let us drink to the last hours of this glad New Year!

[An excited babble comes from junkmen at the sight of NI PAU. MOTHER GOD DAMN fiercely orders them to be silent, in Chinese.]

DE MICHOT

It's a white girl!

CHARTERIS

I say—it is—white as my hand.

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

White——?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Of course—of course.

CHARTERIS

What are you doing!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I serve mouse pie!

CHARTERIS

What does it mean?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I hold an auction! I sell this girl to the flesh junks. Those merry men have come to bid for her. She is setting sail for the open seas—and you are here to tell her bon voyage.

[A murmur of horror from guests.]

CHARTERIS

You haven't asked us here to show us things like that!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

A glimpse of China's bowels to see them fight for her! A sight you have never seen before—and one—to teach you—much.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

You must be joking.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I am simply taking off that mask that bothered you.

CHARTERIS

We'll not stand for this.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Only a little unwashed rat from Blood Town! She is pretty, though, is she not? Her eyes are not bad—eh, Oshima?

Stop!

CHARTERIS

MOTHER GOD DAMN

She has slim thighs—white skin—gold hair, eh? Look at the junkmen—how their eyes glisten—how their bellies heave—they are like dogs held by a leash. Just as some white men—like yellow women—Chinamen like English girls.

CHARTERIS

You say the girl is English, too?

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

What does she say? Is the girl English?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, Sir John. The girl is English. All English.
Now what?

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

This is outrageous!

DE MICHOT

Horrible!

[Other exclamations from table.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Take care, Sir John. Remember—if my frolics shock you, still be wise. See, too, that your friends are wise—it will be the best for all of you.

CHARTERIS

What are you daring to do?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Guy—Guy! This is not the eager lover talk of a little while ago.

CHARTERIS

We'll have the law here in half a moment—if you don't stop!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

The law. I am the police! I am the government!
I am the law here!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

Blessington! The woman's taken leave of her senses! What had we better do?

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

Sit still—can't you see—it's some sort of a prank. It will amount to nothing.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*To NI PAU.*]

Hold your head up—we all wish to look at you.

[*MOTHER GOD DAMN shouts to the junkmen to start bidding.*]

Bid! Bid!

[*The junkmen shout and gesticulate, making offers.*]

[*One of them reaches out and grabs at NI PAU, who shudders and screams.*]

MME. DE MICHOT

Oh, I am sick.

DE MICHOT

[*Fiercely.*]

Be quiet.

LADY BLESSINGTON

[*Piteously.*]

John, take me home.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

Stop this devilish thing at once—you crazy strumpet!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Crazy strumpet! Ha, ha, ha! That is what he calls me—now the mask is off!—before dinner it was different. He wanted a rendezvous with me right then—a rendezvous d'amour— But I persuaded him to wait.

CHARTERIS

Sir John—De Michot—Gregory! Get the ladies out as quickly as you can. I'll stay and deal with this woman!

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

Don't get excited. Sit down, please.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, sit down, please. Take Sir John's advice.

LADY BLESSINGTON

I'm damned if I will!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I'm damned if you won't. Ask Sir John why he dares not go? You have been asked here for a pur-

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

pose. You will all stay—until I am through with you.

DONNA D'ACHUNA

[*Rising suddenly and speaking in a loud, insolent voice.*]

Get me out of here—Koo Lot Foo—I want air!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Laughing.*]

You want air? The jade-snatching wife of a cuckold husband—screams for air!

DONNA D'ACHUNA

How dare you! You horrible woman!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Pooh! All Shanghai knows who gives you the jade you wear—and why! But it does not know of the Magnolia house you kept in Singapore in 1914-15-16! You weren't Spanish then—you weren't a donna then—you were a very pretty woman—then—and your name was Minnie Baxter!

[DONNA D'ACHUNA *subsides with a hoarse sob.*]

[MOTHER GOD DAMN *looks threateningly around the table.*]

Does any one else—wish to hear—the little private history of himself? If so, just let him ask for air!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

KOO LOT FOO

I am convinced we had all better sit still—and do without air.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Amiably to CHARTERIS.*]

You see—they do not go. They sit and wait and listen as you will sit and wait and listen—my darling Guy, you may have lost your manners—but you see, you are still my darling Guy!

[*She shouts an order for the bidding to continue.*]

[*To NI PAU.*]

Stand up—show yourself!

[*As the bidding starts anew, MOTHER GOD DAMN urges it on furiously, talking at the guests.*]

That is robbers' talk!—What do you think she is—a China girl? She is an English girl!—She will earn her weight in gold for you before she dies.—What a chance for you!—A girl who is English!—A girl who has not yet been taught to love—who is all yours to teach—why do you not bid, Wang-Tti? Think of her red lips upon your mouth!—Why do you not bid, Shu-Ki? Think of her soft breasts against your ugly chest!—Why don't you bid—Look at her——

[*She yanks NI PAU so that the junkmen get a better view of her.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Yae ye—yah ye—you stingy toads, I'm selling—
not giving. Oh!—Two thousand tael but you won't
get her for that— Oh, no——

DONNA D'ACHUNA

Ah— I'm sick——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You sick—Donna Querebro D'Achuna—don't
make me laugh!

[She turns to the buyers.]

That last offer was two thousand tael—not so
bad—but not enough——

*[She pulls NI PAU's hands away from her
breasts.]*

ONE OF THE JUNKMEN

[Inflamed by the girl's beauty—shouting.]

I give—five thousand tael!—I give five thousand
tael!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Five thousand tael— Who offers me more——

*[The other junkmen are silent—they shake their
heads.]*

Sold!—A good price even for an English girl.

[She snatches the money from him—and puts it

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

into her dress. The other junkmen exit, grumbling. The purchaser starts toward NI PAU.]

No—to-morrow you may get her——

[*She commands him to go. He exits unwillingly. She laughs.*]

Ha!—He wants her now! But I have not finished with her yet! I wish her to do some advertising for my place—to-night!

[*There is a ghastly silence at the table as MOTHER GOD DAMN reseats herself, laughing. Her tone is conversational and light but laced with mockery and hate.*]

To-morrow the girl will be painted—and scented up—we will powder her toes—and spray her with patchouli—and prepare her for the beastly palate of Mr. Tong Kai Li! You saw him. The stringy one! The little one! With eyes like pigs!—we will stuff her mouth with cotton so she cannot cry—and tie her to a litter—and send her to the wharves!

[*She looks about the table—no one makes a move—she continues, laughing.*]

Why don't you do something? The girl is white! —Ha!—You are afraid of me—that's why!

[*Her voice rings with contempt.*]

Lechers!—Lechers!—Cowards!

[*She turns to TSA, who has been waiting impassively.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Take her away! Take her away!—

[*She becomes once more the conventional hostess.*]

Now—we can resume the dinner—Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins— More champagne—

[*The “boys” rush to fill glasses.*]

Let us drink to Chinese New Year’s.

[*To CHARTERIS.*]

And a pledge to Chinese women—Sir Guy Charteris!

CHARTERIS

[*Slowly, tensely.*]

Wait a minute! Call that grinning devil of yours—back here—

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You forget your manners again, Charteris.

CHARTERIS

Call back that monstrosity of yours—have that girl put into proper clothes—at once—

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You will buy her yourself—? Ah, that makes me jealous— Remember you have a pledge with *me*—after dinner!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

You do what I say—and quickly—or there'll be trouble——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Coolly.*]

What are you that you dare to order me——?

CHARTERIS

You'll find out shortly, if you don't know.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Airily.*]

Oh—I know!—A proud man—yes! A big man—yes! A rich man—yes!—A man who makes most charming love! Oh, yes, yes, *yes!*—but all the same I want to know *what* you are to order me?

CHARTERIS

[*Abruptly.*]

You heard me—Mother God Damn—no more talk!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Take care! . . . Take care! . . . When one brick in a building loosens—others loosen too——

CHARTERIS

You threaten, eh?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Then down comes everything—tumbling—crashing—

CHARTERIS

If Shanghai falls, we'll take damned good care it falls on *you*—

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You will risk this smash—your own bones too—for a Blood Town girl?

CHARTERIS

I'll risk it!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah! There is a nobleman for you—a gentleman from England.

CHARTERIS

Have that girl brought back!—Will you or will you not do as I order you to do?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No—my *splendid fellow*—I will *not* do as you order me to do! YOU order me!

CHARTERIS

Then we'll see the finish, here to-night—of a Chinese brothel—and a very troublesome—Chinese woman!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And also—the finish of a British merchant—who now must chew—what he has bitten off! Now let all social Shanghai here—look its last at you!

CHARTERIS

You—unmitigated——!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I think a Chinese woman helped you once, my friend——

CHARTERIS

Who are you—you painted—yellow—Jezebel——!

[OSHIMA *and* Koo Lot Foo *half start to their feet*—MOTHER GOD DAMN *puts out her hand.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Thank you, Oshima!—Thank you—good Koo Lot Foo—but wait!

[*To* CHARTERIS.]

Would you really like to have me tell you who I am?——

CHARTERIS

I would!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Slowly—in an odd flat voice.*]

I was a Princess of Tung Kow—my house was the

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

great house of the Chi-Yan-Ko!—My father had 10,000 camels and 5,000 horses—and many, many boxes of gold money——

[She pauses—laughs.]

Now, my name is Mother God Damn!—I deal female to male, my trade is flesh!—I have a house where Fate of every sort runs very quickly—one lap ahead of death—and now, I, *too*—have many, many, many boxes of gold money, because I keep the largest brothel in the world!—Damned funny, isn't it, old top——

[She pauses.]

You know me now!—Look at me, and tell them who I am—and why you may not *order* me!

CHARTERIS

[Slowly—inarticulately.]

Who—are you——!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Through her teeth.]

Quick—the little name of love you used to call me—quick!——

CHARTERIS

[Putting up his hand as though to ward her off.]

No—No!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Hello! Mr. Blue Eyes!——

[She strikes her thighs and laughs in his face.]

Are you not glad to see again Miss Pink!

CHARTERIS

[Starting to his feet.]

You—that girl!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ee—ye!—That Manchu girl.

CHARTERIS

It can't be—no—no——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Who left her Manchu mountains and ran away to Shanghai to marry you in English fashion—and have many sons by you!

CHARTERIS

What are you saying?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, my blue-eyed lad—I am that girl who stole for you—my father's money——

CHARTERIS

Be silent!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ten bags of gold so he could buy his place in the great English firm where he has made himself—Taipan——

CHARTERIS

You lie!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Which you have done——

CHARTERIS

The woman's as crazy as a bedlam hare!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I am Aunt Jessica! May Buddha rest my maiden soul! |

[She grins mockingly—turns to CHARTERIS, says.]

The mystery of my love-life—now you know?

CHARTERIS

Are we going to sit here all night and let this woman babble on?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, yes, big Taipan—all this city soon will hold its sides with laughing at the joke on you!—Yes, yes, while one stick, one stone of Shanghai stands the

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

story will be told how to-night—not knowing me—you came, swanking and leering—to beg a rendezvous d'amour with me!

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

I beg you—let's have no more of this!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

My charming hands—my mystery—I wear a mask you must see through! When may you sleep with me—will I give you devil doings—Walpurgis nacht!—new lust you weep for! By God, you love me!—I must be Astoreth for you!

KOO LOT FOO

No good will come of this, my niece!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

It is a joke! I say—that he should come—this man—to ask new excitements from me—the bawdy China woman—who was the girl he used—but did not marry English fashion!

SIR JOHN BLESSINGTON

I beg——!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Furiously.*]

Be silent!—Sit and listen! Listen—all of you!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

No, no! I did not find myself his wife! Oh, no—I found myself naked on an auction plate in a rotting Blood Town wharf-shed while junkmen bid for me!

[*Murmur of horror from table.*]

To-night you saw me sell a Blood Town rat—and heard him roar his noble protest! Why don't you laugh! I laugh! I scream! I choke!—A taipan comes to woo a strumpet—and Mr. Blue Eyes meets Miss Pink!—The boomerang! Mother God Damn chokes!—Beat her on the back, Oshima, beat her on the back!

CHARTERIS

[*To Koo Lot Foo.*]

Damn you, Koo Lot Foo—do something with this screaming madwoman! Either put a stop to her—or get us out of here!—

OSHIMA

I think, sir, it is your turn to listen——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*In an awful voice.*]

He ye—hola!—into the nasty entrails of the China Sea on a junk of giggling hopeless girls I went!—

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Chained under a battened hatch in a floating catchall for the filth the land spewed out!—

[*A low murmur from the table. CHARTERIS moves nervously, accidentally touching LADY BLESSINGTON. She cries out, jumps up—crowding against DE MICHOT.*]

LADY BLESSINGTON

[*In disgust of CHARTERIS.*]

Ah-h!—Change place with me, De Michot——!

[*DE MICHOT stands—giving LADY B. his seat—he does not take the one vacated.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Her voice a ghastly whisper.*]

Yae ye yah ye!! A new port each day we make . . . how the coolies screech—the gangmen yell—as the junks come sliding in from the greasy sea—! And for every woman there are men—sometimes thirty—sometimes forty in a night! That's how Mr. Blue Eyes thought to finish off Miss Pink! Throw her to the junkmen—she'll not last long!

MRS. GREGORY

[*Sobbing in nervous horror.*]

Oh, God! Oh, God!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Continuing in a swift monotone.*]

No! They do not last long—these girl-junk-women—Dirty things from men they catch! Rats poison them!—they get sores from sour rice! But I did not die—! I survived—Rickshaw men in Nagasaki!—The pearl fishers of Cran! The—Nugget men of New South Wales . . . !

MME. DE MICHOT

[*Hysterically.*]

Mon Dieu—Mon âme!—Sacre nom de Dieu—c'est abominable—ça!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes—yes—all—all I survived—whippings with hippo hide when I was stubborn—hut dung thrust into my nostrils and stinging leeches in my ears so I could not sleep—I survived!—sulphur burned on my naked back to make my tired body gay . . . the soles of my feet cut open and pebbles sewn inside so I could not run away—I survived! I survived it all!—Hate helped me—black gods helped me—hell and the devil helped me—I lived!—I lived!——

[*For an instant her voice rises—she puts her face close to CHARTERIS—her voice sinks to a whisper.*]

—And here I am after twenty years—here after

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

twenty years, am I, my dear—to pay this debt to you!

[Her voice becomes light, conversational.]

But now for the moment—let that pass!

[She rises.]

Now I will say au revoir!—This is New Year's and a very busy evening for my trade!

[She crosses to the staircase—pauses and looks back, smiling.]

You can all go, if you like!—There is no more dinner—I wisely did not order beyond the fish!—I was sure there would be no more appetite!

[She begins to mount the stairs.]

Ha!—I've saved myself—entrée—roast and sweet!

[Laughs.]

Damn thrifty these Chinese women!

[She continues up.]

Bon soir—Bon nuit—Adieu!

[She reaches the top.]

Adieu! Bon nuit! Bon soir!

[She walks along the upper gallery, kisses her hands down to the company, laughs and exits through the door she entered first. The company sit in horrible silence as

THE CURTAIN FALLS]

ACT III

ACT III

"The Little Room of the Great Cat."

This is MOTHER GOD DAMN's own private sitting-room. It is a charming room, with gold walls hung with yellow brocade. It is furnished in lacquer—tables, chairs and a chaise longue—all in odd Chinese designs. Pink shaded lamps hang from the ceiling; also a great gong, manipulated by a tasseled cord. On a teakwood stand in one corner of the room sits a great cat of gold, with snarling mouth and outstretched claws. At the back, left, heavy curtains hide a window—which later in the act is flung open, showing the roof tops of Shanghai. The room is entered from doors, right and left.

At the rise of the curtain MOTHER GOD DAMN is discovered with CHO-TSI, the amah, who is putting the finishing touches to a change of head-dress. MOTHER GOD DAMN has also changed from the dress of the previous scene. She is wearing a Chinese indoor jacket of soft silvered crêpe. The amah is talking volubly and MOTHER GOD DAMN is laughing merrily. The amah is describing some amusing occurrence in Chinese.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN *claps her hands and holds her sides. There is a knock at the door. The amah crosses and admits Koo Lot Foo—who enters in angry haste.*

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Sweetly to Koo Lot Foo.*]

So—you are very angry, eh?

KOO LOT FOO

I am horrified—appalled—I am alarmed!—you have raised such dust—it may choke us all!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No—I do not think that I will choke.

KOO LOT FOO

You are a remarkable woman.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So you have often said.

KOO LOT FOO

A great woman.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So all China says.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

KOO LOT FOO

But to-night you have done too much.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I caused good ructions, eh?

KOO LOT FOO

That pulling down at dinner was a most scandalous affair—most scandalous.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Don't say things twice—I hear you.

KOO LOT FOO

A horrible affair—distressing—painful——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Pauses.*]

Ah, how I should have liked to peek just once!—But that would have been most undignified—anticlimactic—after that majestic sailing up the stairway!

KOO LOT FOO

[*Injured.*]

And then to pull *me* down! What was the need of that?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I used you only for one small egg in my big omelette.

KOO LOT FOO

And also to speak of jade. That embarrassed Donna Querebro D'Achuna very greatly.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

To lose her trousers at a big parade would not embarrass that one!

KOO LOT FOO

I tell you, this whole affair is much the worst of any since my bad luck caused me to meet you first!—I cannot think how it will end!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ha! Ha! Ha!

KOO LOT FOO

Listen to me. You must allow this man Charteris to leave your house—at once!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Must—must—only a brave man says must to me!

KOO LOT FOO

I do large business with his firm. To-night, I am

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

responsible for him. You cannot hold him here against his will——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I cannot—eh?

KOO LOT FOO

They have put him in the little black room—below the stairs—is this outrage by your order?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Shrugging.*]

He raised a row. He did not wish to stay. I wished him to.

KOO LOT FOO

Already you have damaged him so greatly he can never be quite easy in his head again! . . . What more can you want of him!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Much and plenty!—From him—so far—I have snipped off—but one small toe-nail!

KOO LOT FOO

[*Alarmed.*]

You plan further vexings of him?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Eeye!—This New Year's night, there are yet many things for him to hear and see before the cock crows for the dawn!——

KOO LOT FOO

To use a man of large affairs in this manner is unthinkable!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Oh, I am still hospitable!—He has cigars, cigarettes—whisky—also much to think about!—I shall see him presently!

KOO LOT FOO

What damage you have done us all by this night's work—no one can say! You were mad to sell that English girl! It will cause great anger and resentment!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Eh bien? Eh bien?

KOO LOT FOO

If the story *should* get about it would be a great catastrophe. A most distressing thing for China trade!—Of course the story will not get about

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

since the mouth of every one who saw has been stopped so cleverly by you—but if it should——

[*Meditates.*]

No—you must let her go!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Pleasantly.*]

Must! How I feel about that word—you know!

KOO LOT FOO

Tell me—you will let her go!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

It is true you gave me cash and jade—it is true I *was* your niece!—It is true you set me up!—But that was long ago—now, who I buy or sell—is no affair of yours!

[*AMAH enters.*]

AMAH

[*Speaking in Chinese.*]

The girl will soon be dressed—I have given the rope coolies your order!

[*Koo Lot Foo exclaims in horror.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Maliciously.*]

You see now—why I do not let her go—that English girl——

[*She rings gong.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

KOO LOT FOO

That is your plan for her!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

That is my plan for her!

KOO LOT FOO

You must not do this thing!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Tut! Tut! That word!—That word!

KOO LOT FOO

You must not!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Avaunt—my boring uncle!—Your clamor fidgets me!

KOO LOT FOO

[*Frantic.*]

If you do this—I tell you—we can never mend the harm!—

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Darkly.*]

That girl will advertise my place to-night—*in the usual way!*

[*CÆSAR-HAWKINS enters.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

You rang the gong for me?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes—go find Lin Chi, my clerk—be sure he understands that he is to wait until the rope coolies begin their work—before he fetches Sir Guy Charteris here to me!

KOO LOT FOO

[*To CÆSAR-HAWKINS.*]

[*Almost tearfully.*]

Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins—you have some little influence I think with Mother God Damn——

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Ruefully.*]

Myself who has no influence—even with myself—what influence could I have with any other person?

KOO LOT FOO

But you collaborate on poems with her—often your voice soothes her so she nods when you are reading. Try to persuade her to——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Wheeling on Koo Lot Foo.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

—No—we will not involve him in this— Go!—
I've had enough of you to-day.

[Koo Lot Foo *retreats from her.*]

Enough of you—enough of you to-day——

[Koo Lot Foo *hastens his footsteps—she chases him off.*]

Enough of you to-day!

[*As the door closes, she turns smiling to CÆSAR-HAWKINS.*]

No, no—Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins, you are too lazy and too gentle to mix up my big events——!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Right-o!— Too lazy—too gentle—to find a place in any big event—but what does it matter?

[*Listens.*]

That orchestra is tip-top, isn't it?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Filipino—and most expensive—but on New Year's one must give the dancing fools something for their money——!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Your place is doing very well to-night!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Thank you—it is doing very well!——

[*She gives him a very strange smile.*]

Yes—you are a very funny fellow!—you make no

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

reference to the many things you heard me say at dinner——

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

You have not asked me to!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Nodding.*]

Yes—you English have *one* trait most admirable
—reticence—one forgives much for that!

[*There is a loud laugh in the hall outside.*]

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS and MOTHER GOD DAMN
listen.]

What is that?

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Opening the door and looking out.*]

Prince Oshima and—that lady—will you see them?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Why not? [*She listens.*] The rope coolies have
not yet begun their work!—Yes, for a minute I will
see them.

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS *exits*, and a moment later
PRINCE OSHIMA *enters* with POPPY. POPPY
*wears a Parisian evening frock and a Spanish
shawl.* MOTHER GOD DAMN *advances towards
them.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Ah!—Here is that naughty one—that valiant prince—my Paris Japanese! And Miss S-smith——

POPPY

I've been to a ball—and I'm drunk! Ha, ha, ha! and I want more bubbly—bubbly—bubbly—bubbly——

[Flops on a couch, giggling.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[To OSHIMA.]

But you, you did not go to a ball! Why do *you* not congratulate me on my dinner?

OSHIMA

[Slowly.]

It was a dinner—to remember always——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Like thunder—it has cleared the air for me. I feel young—remade—refreshed—at this moment I do not feel older—than a million years!

OSHIMA

Then indeed your girlhood is renewed——

POPPY

[Suddenly to OSHIMA.]

Kiss me, you devil—kiss me!——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

[*She throws her arms about his neck.*]

[MOTHER GOD DAMN *gives a surprised shrug.*

POPPY *continues wildly.*]

POPPY

But why doesn't the bubbly come? Where the devil is it?

OSHIMA

It's ordered.

POPPY

And the pipe! Did you order the pipe, too—darling?

OSHIMA

I ordered everything, you naughty child—everything you told me to. . . .

POPPY

Nice boy! Kiss me again.

[*She kisses him again—then continues.*]

Yes, must have a pipe—love pipes!

[SERVANT *enters with a tray of champagne.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Coolly.*]

Here is your—ah—bubbly!

POPPY

Ah! Ha, ha, ha!

[*Drains her glass.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Drank a whole quart down once—without stopping.

[*She giggles—looks around.*]

He didn't bring the pipe, the—damned jackass!

OSHIMA

Let us not have—the pipe, Poppy—it is—no good!

POPPY

[*Screaming.*]

I want a pipe—I tell you!

[*Stamps her foot.*]

I will have a pipe!

OSHIMA

[*Insinuatingly.*]

A pipe will make you go to sleep—I don't want you to go to sleep. . . .

POPPY

Pipe never makes me go to sleep—makes me wilder, you'll see. . . .

POPPY

[*To MOTHER GOD DAMN.*]

He's afraid I won't bite him. Ha, ha, ha! Want to see me bite him?

[*She springs on OSHIMA.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

A-h!

[She clings like a panther—digging her nails into him.]

POPPY

That's—what—he likes! Likes my teeth—my nails—likes me to dig them into him— He's a devil! I love him—mad about him. Kiss me.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[To OSHIMA.]

It will be better for you, I think, my friend, if she has a pipe.

[OSHIMA laughs. MOTHER GOD DAMN gives order to SERVANT who assents and exits.]

POPPY

[Relaxing her hold on OSHIMA.]

This man can kiss—makes me feel all needles—needles and ice—pins—fire—all over— He's best man I ever had. . . .

OSHIMA

[Disgustedly.]

Poppy—what are you saying?

[He tries to put his hand over her mouth.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

[*Laughing.*]

Best man I ever had—I tell you!

OSHIMA

[*Drawing away angrily.*]

You don't know what you're saying—you haven't had other men——

POPPY

Haven't I? Had heaps of 'em—heaps of 'em!

OSHIMA

Before me——?

POPPY

Ha, ha, ha! And after you—and when you go—there'll be lots more—didn't think you were the first, did you? Ha, ha, ha!

[*She screams with laughter.*]

Me! I am a nymphomaniac, I am!

[*She continues to laugh.*]

Nymphomaniac—nympho—man-iac! Never going to get married either. What's getting married—the same four legs in the same bed—all the time—always—horrible! Ugh!

[*OSHIMA does not move.*]

What's the matter—with you? Kiss me!

[*Her face distorts; she comes angrily at him.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Don't look at me like that. I'll get angry!

[*Stamps her foot.*]

You don't want to see me angry twice— Last week I nearly killed my amah! If you look at me like that, I'll kill you. I'll kill you—Ye-ess!

OSHIMA

Sit down!

POPPY

Won't sit down—I knew you—you want me. I give you what you want—you give me what I want! That's all I want—that's all I want—kiss me!

[*She puts her arms around him again. He succumbs. She turns, laughing.*]

See—badder I am—better—he likes me—where's the bubbly?

[*She takes a glass from tray and drinks. To*

MOTHER GOD DAMN.]

Why aren't *you* drinking—Mother God Damn?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I do not need alcohol—for my wits—or for my passions——

[*Her face is inscrutable—but there is disgust in her eyes.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

I love to get drunk— Love it! Love it!

[SERVANT enters with tray on which a service of opium is set—the oil already burning.]

Here's the yen!

[She rushes to the tray.]

Love everything—wine—men—drugs! Oh, I am a bad one!

[To SERVANT.]

Go away—I know what to do!—Yes, I'm a bad one! That's what I want to be!—Want to live my life like a man! All most women ever get is the same four legs in a bed always—always!—That's marriage! Ugh!—Horrible! Low—I wouldn't stand it—not one minute!

POPPY

[She takes pipe, inhales, flops backward on sofa.]

Yes, I'm a bad one. Funny, isn't it! My mother was a saint—she's dead. Father—so upright—if you bent him, he'd snap in two!

[She inhales again—then exhales.]

Everything wonderful now. Come here and kiss me, Oshima. Want you to kiss me. A-h! Danced too much to-night—drank too much—feel sleepy—don't care. By'm by, I'll wake up—then we'll have fun!

[The pipe rolls from her hand.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

[Picking up pipe—lifting POPPY'S hand and letting it fall.]

We had better let her sleep a little.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Is she—mad?

OSHIMA

[Smiling.]

Ah, she is wicked, isn't she, this lovely child.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Incredulously.]

Can it be true—what you say—that she is well born—well taught?

OSHIMA

So—she amazes even you——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Slowly.]

In my time—I have seen much—but never anything like that! She is too awful—even for me! She makes me sick! She is like leprosy—like some foul disease—some unclean animal! Take her away, please. I do not want her here. I do not want her here, I tell you—take her away!

[She rings bell.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

You forget—this is a public house—I am paying you!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Haughtily.*]

These are my private quarters, Prince Oshima. She belongs in Blood Town—with half-castes—in filth—with creeping things. Take her out—I will not have her here! Your rooms are ordered—go to them.

[*She rings the gong.*]

OSHIMA

Poppy—wake up—come with me!

POPPY

No, no! Don't let's go—I'm tired—let's sleep here.

OSHIMA

Wake up—*chesai komo!* You know you promised to be gay.

POPPY

Gay—right-o! Must be gay. Where am I? What's it all about anyhow?

[*She staggers to her feet.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

Come!

POPPY

Where are we going?

OSHIMA

Upstairs!

POPPY

[*Laughing.*]

Right-o! Kiss me first!

[*She throws her arms about his neck—then staggers to* MOTHER GOD DAMN.]

Ha!—I like you! You're just as bad as I am—you kiss me, too.

[*She throws her arms around* MOTHER GOD DAMN *and kisses her.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Shuddering away.*]

Agh! Ugh!—Take her away from me! Take her away from me!

OSHIMA

Come, Poppy, save your kisses—for me.

[*Mockingly to* MOTHER GOD DAMN.]

We bid you good night—and pleasant dreams!

[*He pulls* POPPY *toward door.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

Ha, ha, ha!

OSHIMA

[*At the door.*]

Say good night to her!

[*He takes POPPY's hand and waves it at*
MOTHER GOD DAMN.]

POPPY

Good night!

[*They exit; POPPY preceding—we hear her laugh—then his mocking laugh. He looks back smiling, then closes the door. MOTHER GOD DAMN gives an order to the AMAH, who enters in response to her gong.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*In Chinese.*]

Get me water and a towel.

AMAH

[*Answering.*]

Yes, great lady.

[*She exits, Left. MOTHER GOD DAMN stands lost in thought. AMAH reënters immediately with a lacquer basin and towel. MOTHER GOD DAMN carefully washes her lips and*

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

hands—as though to free herself from the contamination of POPPY's touch. While she is doing this, there is a knock at the door, Left. The AMAH admits LIN CHI, the Mole.]

LIN CHI

[In Chinese.]

Taipan Charteris is here.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[In Chinese.]

Let him come in.

[She pauses.]

Wait.

[She hands basin and towel to the AMAH, who exits, Right, with them.]

I wish all you servants to wait outside and listen for the gong. Come when you hear it.

[LIN CHI bows and exits. MOTHER GOD DAMN then moves to the curtained window and draws a fold of the curtain over her.]

[A second later CHARTERIS is ushered in by LIN CHI, the Mole, who withdraws. CHARTERIS stands looking about him with uncertainty. There is a laugh from behind the curtains. MOTHER GOD DAMN parts them and comes towards him.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So, after twenty years we find ourselves alone together, chérie? After dinner—I said—and here you are—and by the back stairs, too—the great man comes. I wonder has he come for that rendezvous d'amour?

CHARTERIS

[Looking her in the eye.]

Yes. If you wish it. It's a long time since we have been together. Shall we begin again?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You are a bold man! I like bold men— Ye yeah ye!

CHARTERIS

I like bold women—that was a bold thing you did at dinner.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You liked my big bondabust Karoo?

CHARTERIS

It made me love you more than ever.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Jesu—Maria, Josef! But you are—as brave as bold! Brave cœur! Brave cœur!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

[*Comes to her and looks at her.*]
So you are Miss Pink?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Sardonically.*]

Ai ye! That Manchu girl—whose poor heart—almost beat itself to death against her ribs—loved you. . . .

CHARTERIS

Great God! Great God!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Quietly—quietly.*]

Have I then so completely changed?

CHARTERIS

You are changed—God knows beyond all telling.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And I feared so that you would recognize me before I wished you to.

CHARTERIS

[*Musing.*]

No one would ever know you for that girl—and yet——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And yet—what?

CHARTERIS

I never have loved any one but you!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No?

CHARTERIS

Did you think I loved my wife? That cold, proud saint—No! I married her because—my firm demanded it— When her child was born, she *died!* That was all.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Oh, yes—your daughter—they were speaking of at dinner—brilliant, beautiful they say—and—and—but come, Mr. Blue Eyes—look—look at me—closer—closer and see if——

CHARTERIS

Yes!—Yes!—I think I see Miss Pink again—she is slowly coming back—a little, a very little!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Miss Pink cannot come back— There are many minutes in the hour—many hours in the day—many

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

days and nights in twenty years—and Miss Pink is dead——

CHARTERIS

She is not dead!—I will not have it so—Miss Pink *shall* come back!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

C'est vous qui parle!—But won't you sit—no?—Then, stand! C'est la même chose!— A cigar? No?—Cigarettes?—Whisky?—No? Sha!—Sha!

CHARTERIS

What a wild young loving thing you were—and how pretty too.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Was I? That was long ago—I am *not* pretty now.

CHARTERIS

You were steel to my flint—and we struck a flame—that can never be put out.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And now you know at last that I—am I—you still wish to change the color of your love-life—eh?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

I still wish for you—I am more in love with you this moment than I ever was—I swear it!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Her eyes glistening.*]

Ai ye! Ai ye! Tell me just *what* is in your mind?

CHARTERIS

What is in *your* mind?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Shaking her head.*]

Only funny pictures!

CHARTERIS

[*Believing he sees his vantage.*]

That little house here by the river—eh? With the high fence about it—that shut us in—when our love was young and the little garden with the dwarf pines—where we used to sit on summer evenings—long ago——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Nodding slowly, speaking low and very simply.*]

And you would play “Annie Rooney” on the banjo—and I would creep towards you—so—and put my

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

arms around you—so! and you would kiss me and promise me the moon—eh! Hm! You do not kiss me now—or promise me the moon.

[She leans towards him her eyes sweet and tender.]

CHARTERIS

Let me kiss you—let me!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Tenderly.]

Perhaps!—You sink— We shall go way, way back then—begin all over?

CHARTERIS

Yes! Yes!—Miss Pink, forgive me—forget it all—and come back to me.

[He is about to take her in his arms—when she changes and turns on him laughingly.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No! No!—The smell is not so good! It has a stale hollow scent—I smell a male who is afraid and very desperate but for all that—a clever man is Don Juan Charteris!

CHARTERIS

Don't—don't!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

But the sweetheart he wants to lick is very hard.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Even his hot wet tongue cannot make it melt—even so small a bit as that——

[She snaps her finger nail at him.]

CHARTERIS

Please listen to me——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No, no! I've heard enough! Spit no more sugar on me, Monsieur Saccharine! It will not shut my mouth or save your skin.

CHARTERIS

If you will only listen everything can be cleared up—easily!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Cleared up! Cleared up! Now you wish to clear things up! You tidy Englishman——!

CHARTERIS

What do you want of me then?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Let me see!—What did I promise?—Ah, yes!——
To let you meet my cat——

[She points to the crouching gold cat.]
—my great gold cat—my emblem! See, here he is!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

—Can you hear him snarling in his throat at sight of you?

[*She pauses—regarding him quizzically.*]

Ha, ha! How would be—I wonder—had we all arrived upon this planet by the route of the great cats—instead of through the apes—a quaint conceit—eh?

CHARTERIS

[*Through his teeth.*]

Yes! A quaint conceit!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Instead of futile idiotic creatures—up to weak silly tricks! We would be a stealthy lot—silent, arrogant—sure!

[*CHARTERIS moves uneasily.*]

You sweat, Sir Guy—my handkerchief? No? You are nervous—unsure. How funny!

CHARTERIS

Nervous?—Pah!—Don't think it for a moment.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah—but you are!—Now I am never nervous—never! I am always sure! Deviltry brings poise, you know——

[*She laughs wickedly.*]

But my cat is waiting. Ha, Mr. Cat! Let me present to you, the great Taipan Charteris—the

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

fat and handsome mouse, I have promised you so long!

CHARTERIS

[*Dangerously.*]

Ah, that's your tone, eh? Very well! I'm listening.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Listen and also make *sharp* your ears!

CHARTERIS

You've skulked and waited twenty years to spring some wretched thing— That crazy outcry you made at dinner—why didn't you shout out about it long ago——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ha-ha-ha!

CHARTERIS

Why?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

If I should tattle all the things I know—who hates who—who loves who—who steals from who—who kills who and why—I should not be the greatly feared and most respected person that I am—I do not tell until the time is right—I wait until the mouse is fat.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

How much?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

All you have would not be half enough! Had you ten times more than what you have it still would be but *one* drop of what I'm going to take away from you, but I shall not loot your stinking penny pouch!

CHARTERIS

Well, just what is it then you think you're going to take from me?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

What holds you together, Charteris—the glue that keeps your body to your soul?

CHARTERIS

I say you are gunning with a vengeance, aren't you?

[*Crossing to her.*]

Come! Just what *do* you want?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

To teach you something you are late in learning.

CHARTERIS

Don't talk riddles—speak out!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

That for a smug adventurer from England—to go wooing a Manchu Princess—with false promises and lies in the moonlight outside her father's camel walls is foolish—unwise—dangerous.

CHARTERIS

[*Contemptuously.*]

I am not the first Englishman—nor the last—to promise things to native women.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You do amuse me, Charteris! It was I who stooped to you—not you to me— Your breeding is held in absolute contempt by me!——

CHARTERIS

[*Angered.*]

By *you*?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

By me!—The emblem of your lineage is roast beef!—Mine is a sword of honor and of war!——

CHARTERIS

[*Insultingly.*]

In any event you native women have an idiotic way of wanting us to marry you.—Well, for all your devil raising I did not marry you, did I?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No! You did not marry me— Perhaps before the end, my man, you will wish you had!

CHARTERIS

When things are finished—they're finished! The time had come to end our little establishment——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Eee-ye! Our small romance! Our little affaires de cœur à la Pierre Loti!

CHARTERIS

But you couldn't see—you wouldn't see! You only hampered me—! God!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Imitating.*]

God! How dared I hamper you—a rising Englishman! An industrious, faithful, honest chap who had bought his way into a big firm with the money left him by—Aunt Jessica! Ha! Ha! Yae Ye a Ye!

CHARTERIS

So that is what you want—I see in your eye the gold you stole and brought me from your father!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Scornfully.*]

My father's gold! ! You ass! !

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

[*Sullenly.*]

Well, I had to have it!—and you knew it——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You had to have it, eh? Oh! You greedy, greedy man——

CHARTERIS

Had you been sensible——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

My senses only had one thought—the mother of your sons, you said, I was to be!

CHARTERIS

[*With a laugh.*]

Mother? Mother God Damn! Miss Pink!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes—a long, long journey—I grant you—from that Miss Pink to Mother God Damn——

CHARTERIS

[*Quizzically.*]

You haven't done yourself so badly if the truth be told!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah! You think not! Your hat is off to me, eh?—
The daughter of the great Khan has made a clever
harpy of herself through you, my man, eh?

CHARTERIS

You always did have brains—and the pluck of the
very devil.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, a genteel pair we two have always been—hum!

CHARTERIS

Suppose—Miss Pink! Suppose!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Mockingly.*]

Suppose! Ha!—He tries again to make me melt—
this frightened man—he proposes now—to turn time
back again—and make another tender reverie.

CHARTERIS

You do not wish me to?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Why not! I like to hear you talk—Yae ya—yah
ye. What it must be to have a mind like yours! A
British mind! Before it I am awed!—Yes—to the
colossal English ego—I make my humble bow!

[*Laughs pleasantly.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

[*Hopefully.*]

I wonder!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Goes to him and smiling up at him.*]

What do you wonder, Mr. Blue Eyes——

CHARTERIS

[*Tenderly.*]

I wonder awfully, Miss Pink.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Throwing up her hands.*]

Miss Pink!— He blows hot again this man who just blew cold! Miss Pink he says—to me—again—he says Miss Pink! He is unbeatable, this man, unbeatable!

CHARTERIS

[*Smiling.*]

Unbeatable.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Turning to the cat.*]

I ask you, Mr. Cat, what shall we do with him?— Have we spoofed and played enough or shall we let him wriggle one more time?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

[*Angrily, quite losing himself and his diplomacy.*]

Yes! We have played enough and now I'll tell the facts to you—I never had an idea of marrying you—Never—from the first.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You wished an English wife for your mahogany, eh!

CHARTERIS

Just that!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So you sent home—and while the girl from England was on her way to marry you—you kindly slept with me! Yae Yae Yah Yae!

CHARTERIS

Quite so!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And then your day of marriage came——

CHARTERIS

Yes.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And you took me in your arms—kissed me and

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

said—I go away, my darling, only on a little journey—a month— Good-by—I love you. I shall soon be back—wait for me.

CHARTERIS

Then somehow you found out that I was married.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes, I found out about the wife.

CHARTERIS

And started coming to my house—banging on the window at night——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And beckoning to you——

CHARTERIS

Calling out my name——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I wished to tell you something.

CHARTERIS

I was afraid that you might see my wife—she was in a delicate condition. You were a nuisance and a terror to me. If you'd been intelligent my wife would have made no difference at all—we could have gone on as always.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Mondays and Fridays you would come to me, eh?

CHARTERIS

We could have arranged the day.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Perhaps on Tuesdays and Saturdays then I should be blessed with English lust.

CHARTERIS

No compromise would do—you wanted all or nothing—so you got nothing.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I was to be the post, eh? for the wandering dog—and think myself damn lucky for the favors. Eeye! But come! That does not explain the selling to the junks of me—how does that come in?

CHARTERIS

I was afraid that you would come and tell my wife about yourself and me—you were mad, insane. I wanted to be rid of you.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

So first you lodged me out in Blood Town with hags and bullies—who tried to hurt and frighten me with whips and sticks.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

Yes, with whips and sticks. I did exactly that.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I too was in a delicate condition——

CHARTERIS

[*Aghast.*]

What!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Oh, yes! Oh, yes!

CHARTERIS

That I swear I never knew.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

But even your hags and bullies with their whips and sticks could not keep me from banging on your window, eh?—I came again—again—and yet again!

CHARTERIS

I tell you I never knew it.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Well, you know it now—but in spite of all your threats and tricks and duggery—I did come once again—the night before you sold me.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

You are jolly—damn well right. I sold you—and I paid damn high to have you taken off.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Where you did not care.

CHARTERIS

Right! Where I did not care—I was afraid of you—to clear you out—to make away with you—was all I thought of—I was afraid of you—I tell you—I wanted you no nearer to me than hell—I prayed to God that you would die!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Let me look at you, Charteris—sit here!

[He seats himself in chair staring at her in angry defiance. She watches him with a curious half-smile.]

Ya ya ya ya! No, your eyes do not change—They are cold—cold like a winter sea—like frozen lakes—that hold in their awful arms bodies they have drowned. I see it now—then I could not.

CHARTERIS

Then you were a fool!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

But you had so often called me wife.

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

[*Sneers.*]

Wife! Ha, ha. Wife you—you—you.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes—I! I! I, why not—I—your wife—not that English girl. The mother of your sons you said! and like the ant and the bee my mind ran on a single track. You see! I thought a son of yours was coming! and that is what I wished to tell you when I beat upon your window, first timidly—then angrily—then in great despair——

CHARTERIS

[*Nervously.*]

Have *I* a son by *you*?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No—you have no son by me.

CHARTERIS

Thank God!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Why do you thank God when I tell you—you have no son by me?

CHARTERIS

I want no saddle-colored sons by you or any one—mixed blood—anæmic half ways—nothings——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Eurasians! Derelicts! Ugh!

CHARTERIS

Yes!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

These said Eurasians—creatures of chance—
blown by ugly winds of lust across the face of
Asia—! Unlucky, restless beings, are they not?—
Just people of the shadows—things in limbo!

CHARTERIS

I want none of them tacked on to me——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No chattering, blue nailed chi-chics in your quiver,
eh—cursed with the bad of both.

CHARTERIS

The bad of both!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Um! Your bad and my bad *might* be very bad
indeed!

CHARTERIS

A tar-brush son by you!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

A tar-brush son to carry you and me about in
him!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

Yes—I thank God again—I have no son by you——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

But you have a daughter, sir—you have a daughter, sir!

CHARTERIS

By you?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Pointing at him.*]

Would you like to see your daughter?

[MOTHER GOD DAMN *pulls back the heavy curtains revealing a great glass window overlooking Shanghai. The scene outside is illuminated in red and purple glares—rockets are bursting, fireworks are shooting up. Just outside the window hangs a great golden cage suspended by a rope, that stretches upward out of sight. In the cage is the crouching figure of little NI PAU, her face turned from the mob below, her yellow hair tumbled about her shoulders. She is dressed in crimson and gold. MOTHER GOD DAMN pushes a sash and the window parts—each half sliding away from the center. The roar of the New Year's celebration in the street below fills the room.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

[*Drawing back, his breath catching.*]

Holy heaven——!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

In that cage—over the front entrance to my house—there is your daughter—Charteris! Look her over carefully.

CHARTERIS

Good God, woman—that's the girl—you sold to-night——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Eee-ye! That is the girl I sold to-night!

CHARTERIS

[*Aghast.*]

What are you anyway— To sell your own flesh and blood—hang her outside your gate——?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ho!—That is no flesh and blood of mine!

CHARTERIS

Whose is she—then!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Is my hair yellow? Is my skin pink?—That girl has no Chinese in her!

[*She smiles at him.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

What are you trying to say—grinning there—
what are you trying to tell me——?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

That you are a fruitful man! You have two
daughters, sir—one all white with an English mother!
One half white—with a Chinese mother!——

CHARTERIS

I don't believe you!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

One night you in my arms—Next night you in an-
other's arms— One night *me*—next night your wife!
—You men! You men!—So-o!! Two new lives be-
gin only a little while apart—and by and by—two
new little lives come into this world—only a little
while apart.

CHARTERIS

[*Crazily.*]

That girl is *not* my daughter! *She* is at home—
I said good night to her just before I left my house
to come to this hag-ridden nightmare of yours—My
daughter is at home I tell you——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Proudly.*]

No-o-o— It is *my* daughter who is in your home!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CHARTERIS

Your daughter—in my home?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Eee-ye! In your home sir!—I have never seen her—since I put her there—but there she is!

CHARTERIS

What are you talking about?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

It is Mother God Damn's daughter, sir, that you have cherished in your home—Mother God Damn's daughter—fine—respected! beautiful! High up—a great lady—who is the mistress of your big important house!—and whom you show off to *your* society!

CHARTERIS

[Pointing to the cage.]

Have you gone mad? Who is *that*?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Quietly.]

That, sir, is the daughter—of your English wife.

CHARTERIS

What!—How!—What do you mean? What hellish trick are you up to now?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I mixed up these children—yours and hers—yours and mine—yours and hers and mine—an exchange—

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

I made one night—long, long ago—now, *now* you see?

CHARTERIS

[*Fiercely.*]

No!—No! I do not see!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Well, my Lord! I came to see you just one more time—after the many window bangings that harried you so much, Charteris.

CHARTERIS

What!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

My baby!

CHARTERIS

Your baby!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Born in Blood Town not yet three days old!

CHARTERIS

Three days old!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Strapped to my back——

CHARTERIS

Good God!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yae Yae ya Yae!—From Blood Town to Alexandra Road my weak legs took me—many miles

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

through mud and rain over stone—all crazy in the head—and shaking so—at what I'd set myself to do. Stumbling, staggering—creeping, crawling—then falling down—then getting up and blindly running—running on and on—so frantic that the day would catch me before I reached your house.

CHARTERIS

God! Almighty God!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You slept—your wife lay dead—the watching amahs thought I was a ghost—and ran away—my poor whimpering little one—the love child of myself and you—I left beside your wife—her child I took away with me—and there she is! Look, Taipan Charteris—there she is!

CHARTERIS

[*Hoarsely.*]

Evelyn's child——!!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Facing her fine social hong! The reception line is in the street below; you hear? I present her to this world of fashion. You are present at your daughter's bow!

CHARTERIS

Be careful! I warn you be careful what you say——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah! She has had a happy care-free youth. Her etiquette she learned in the stew of Blood Town—where pigs grunt—rats squeal—lice crawl.

CHARTERIS

[Clenching his fists, eyes starting out of his head.]

You!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Her airs and graces she got when Ching Chang Mary's whip went—crack!!

CHARTERIS

[Starting towards her fiercely.]

By God! If you're not lying—you will never live to lie again——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah! Hear him! Hear him! This bragging, braying, blowing British jackal!

CHARTERIS

[Convulsively.]

You!—You!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

I put her—just where you put me, you see. Dirt for dirt! Hunger for hunger! Cold for cold! Blows for blows! English for Manchu—and there she hangs, my blue-eyed god—as you hung me—twenty

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

years ago to-night—before drunken, brutal, brawling mobs of Chinese New Year's—to *advertise* a brothel.

CHARTERIS

You——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ha, ha, ha!

[He rushes at her—as though to seize her by the throat—with a deft twist she wrenches a knife from her dress, defending herself. With her other hand she seizes the rope of a gong and pulls it. The great gong reverberates. Instantly the room is filled with MOTHER GOD DAMN'S servants, who fall upon CHARTERIS, while TSA, the Eunuch, pins his arms behind his back. MOTHER GOD DAMN pauses—stopping in front of the Jade Buddha.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Hello—Mr. Talking God!—That is jolly damn well done, eh?—This is a great night, eh?—A great debt-paying, eh?—Ah!—I grow younger and younger—as the night wears on—I do not feel older now—than—ten thousand years!—The centuries are sliding off——

[She stops, listening. The sound of a scuffle

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

is heard, outside the door, Right. Then the door is flung violently back and POPPY staggers into the room. She is torn and disheveled—her cheeks flushed—her eyes wild. OSHIMA follows, trying to restrain her.]

POPPY

Go away—damn you! Want opium—want opium——

[On seeing her, CHARTERIS utters a cry. He strains in the grasp of TSA, the Eunuch.]

CHARTERIS

Poppy!—Poppy!——

POPPY

[With a strangling cry, recognizing CHARTERIS.]

Father!

[They gaze at one another in horror—CHARTERIS' eyes starting from his head; POPPY with lax hands and fallen jaw, completely sobered by the shock of recognition.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Moving a step towards POPPY.]

Eh?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

[With a shuddering moan.]

O—ugh!

[She covers her face and runs from the room.]

OSHIMA *silently follows her.*

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Looking first at CHARTERIS—then at the open door through which POPPY has gone.]

[She looks at CHARTERIS—the whole fearfulness of the situation beginning to dawn on her.]

Yours—and mine!

[A horrible cry escapes from MOTHER GOD DAMN'S throat.]

[TSA, the Eunuch, instantly pulls CHARTERIS through the door, Left. MOTHER GOD DAMN again cries out horribly. She lunges toward the door through which TSA has taken CHARTERIS—then seeming to reconsider, staggers a step or two toward the door through which POPPY has gone. Again she cries out horribly. She bumps against a table blindly. It falls over. Her eyes light on a fragile little gilt basket. She picks it up. Deliberately she rends and tears it—flings it from her. Then she begins to stagger about crazily—lifting vases, chairs and other objects and smashing them to the floor. She goes up to

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

the Buddha, looks at it. With a cry she puts her hand over the Buddha's mouth and spits at it.]

[To the Buddha.]

Don't laugh! Don't laugh!

[With a convulsive shiver she sinks to the floor and crouching—begins to tear handfuls of fur from the rug under her knees—curious, awful animal-like sounds coming from her throat—as the curtain falls—shutting her from view.]

CURTAIN

ACT IV

ACT IV

"The Green Staircase of the Angry Dragon."

SCENE I

A high, deep hallway, painted with turbulent dragons.

At the far back of the hall are three galleries of green lacquer connected by staircases. The scene is lit by flickering green torches on the newel of each staircase. Under the last gallery an open window looks out upon a black sky, scudded with moving storm clouds. Against the night and the clouds a grim, gnarled pine tree is silhouetted.

The curtain lifts on an empty stage—the music of the New Year's celebration elsewhere in the house is heard faintly at intervals. Then a door at the right of the topmost gallery opens and the figure of MOTHER GOD DAMN appears. Slowly she crosses and begins to descend from gallery to gallery, pausing now and again as if in dreadful thought. At the post of the last staircase, the green light reveals her, haggard and unpainted—wearing the dress of the preceding act, now torn and disheveled. She crosses to a door, Right, and knocks. She knocks

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

again. From inside the room comes the sound of frightened whispering. There is a rapid colloquy behind the door between a man and a woman.—We hear POPPY's voice, then OSHIMA's. MOTHER GOD DAMN knocks again.

OSHIMA

[Off stage.]

Yes—yes—who is it?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

It is I!

POPPY

[Off stage—in an angry voice.]

What do you want?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Open the door!

OSHIMA

Are you alone?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Open the door—or I will call my servants to break it down!

[OSHIMA mutters to himself in Japanese, and begins to fumble with the lock off stage.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

[*Off stage—trying to restrain him.*]

Don't open it!—Damn you!—I tell you not to open it——!

[*The door is flung violently open and OSHIMA steps out. His hair is in disarray and he wears a kimono. He closes the door behind him.*]

OSHIMA

[*Under his breath to MOTHER GOD DAMN.*]

In the name of all life's devils—can't you let us alone?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Go home——!

OSHIMA

For one night haven't you done enough— What more do you want to finish off this man?—Hasn't he seen his daughter—in *your* house—with me? What more can be done to him than that—even by *you*?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes-s! Drunk and crazy in *my* house with you!

OSHIMA

Great Shaka!—Had you planned it all—every-

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

thing—step by step—it couldn't have gone better—
your great New Year's gesture!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

My New Year's gesture—is nearly done——!

[*She stops—points to door.*]

Tell—that *thing*—in there—I want her to come
out!

OSHIMA

What do you want of her?

POPPY

[*Flinging open the door and appearing, her
face swollen and distorted, her hands
clenched.*]

Don't call me names—you'd better not! Oshima's
told me everything!—I know all about—my father
and you!——

[*She laughs horribly.*]

And I used to think he was so rigid—he'd break
if he bent down!—Tell him that for me!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Come here—I want to talk to you!

POPPY

[*Closing the door behind her.*]

Well——?

[*Her eyes meet MOTHER GOD DAMN's eyes—
she tries to stare her down, but cannot.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

God. . . !—What a fool I was to come here!—

[*She turns to OSHIMA.*]

It was all your fault, Oshima!

OSHIMA

[*Quickly to MOTHER GOD DAMN.*]

What does her father say?—What is he going to do?

POPPY

[*Bursting in.*]

I don't care what he says!—I don't care what he does!

[*She walks up and down angrily.*]

I was drunk to-night—and that pipe knocked me out for a bit—but I knew what I was saying!

[*She beats her hands together.*]

Well—he's found me out now—and if he thinks he's going to stick me in a convent—or send me home to my grandmother—or put ashes on my head—and dress me in sackcloth—he's—up against a long jump!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Be silent!

OSHIMA

Don't be foolish! What will you do if he throws you out?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

[*Nastily.*]

Marry you!—

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You think so—eh?

POPPY

Or I'll just go away with you!—I don't care which! The showdown's come for me!—I'm just as glad—one can't go on forever—being something—one isn't——!

[*She pauses—then laughs, coming towards*

MOTHER GOD DAMN.]

So you were once my father's little yellow gal!—Merciful Mary—that's a dark card to turn up!—Ye gods!—He gave you rather a dishing out, too, from all Oshima tells me, when he married mother!—I don't blame you a little bit for hating him like the devil— Of course, you weren't his color—but you were a princess—or is that only a pack of swank?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Go on—tell me what more you think?

POPPY

Great Jezebel! It is to laugh! How he used

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

to rail against white mixing up with yellow! It goes to show—you never know!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

You never know!

POPPY

Now I—I'm quite different—I don't mind in the least—mixing up—outside my color! What— Oh, Oshima? But my high and mighty father!—

[To MOTHER GOD DAMN.]

You must have been pretty as the deuce—and clever as all sin—to get him! But what I can't see is—why you were ass enough to believe him!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[To OSHIMA.]

You had better go!—

POPPY

Say!—You're awfully fond of interfering, aren't you? As far as I can make out you've comed it over every one in Shanghai until you think you're Mrs. Buddha! Well, you can't come it over me! No Chinese woman is going to tell me this and that—I'll tell Oshima what he's to do! You keep out!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Controlling herself.]

You had better go—Prince Oshima—

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

Why should we hurry? I see no need!

POPPY

He'll go when I go! And I'll go when I'm ready! Catch that? Savvy that? You may be Mother God Damn—and you may be a princess, but—with me it's all maskee! I don't give a rip who you are! Princess or coolie woman—it's all the same—You're only an old Chinese virago—and your airs are enough to make a fish laugh! What you'd better do is go back and stop all night with my father—I thinks he needs it!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Quietly to OSHIMA.*]

Will you go?

OSHIMA

We aren't ready yet, I tell you!——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Oshima is brave!—He has caught his bravery from the Taipan's daughter—who is brave—but foolish!

POPPY

[*To OSHIMA.*]

Are you going to stand such talk—from her?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

Be careful of her, Poppy—I know the look in her face—when she plans bad things——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Plans bad things—ha, ha, plans bad things! He's all puffed up . . . this fool, because he thinks a high up English lady—fell in love with him——

[*To POPPY.*]

When I tell him who you are—watch him slink away—this Paris Japanese!—Now, I wish you two to meet each other.

[*She seizes POPPY firmly by the wrist.*]

POPPY

Take your filthy hands off me—take them off me!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Now, Prince Oshima—make a bow—not to Miss Charteris—but to the daughter of—Mr. Blue Eyes and Miss Pink! Are you glad to meet her? Do you like her now?

OSHIMA

What——?

POPPY

[*Furiously.*]

Let go of my wrist——!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

OSHIMA

[*As the truth penetrates his first bewilderment.*]

Great Shaka—is this the truth?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Great Shaka— It is the truth——

[POPPY *tries to wrench free—but* MOTHER GOD DAMN *holds her wrist like a vise—and continues crazily.*]

No—no—no! No high up English eaglet— Only a Chinese sparrow——

POPPY

Let go of me!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

How do you like her now, Oshima?—These girls with white fathers and yellow mothers are common enough to you—aren't they? You don't like them, do you? You can get all you want like her for five Mex fifty! Window hangers out in Blood Town—she was born there! She belongs there, doesn't she? She's no better to you—is she—than Lilly, Rosy, Camilla—Jocasta—my half-caste girls—up there on the second floor! Girls you wouldn't touch——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

[*Half afraid.*]

She's hurting me—Oshima! Let go of me—you crazy old devil!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Shaking POPPY back and forth by the wrist.*]

Tell me—if she is any better to you—than any mixed blood thing—that covers its fingernails and puts on patchouli water—to hide the smell! If she is—I'll let her go!

POPPY

What in Hades is she saying?—Make her stop!

[*She wrenches herself free—fingers her hurt wrist.*]

What is she talking about?

[*Screams.*]

Tell me!

[*He does not answer, she runs toward him.*]

What did she say——?

OSHIMA

[*Drawing away from POPPY.*]

She says—she is your mother!

POPPY

She my mother!—Has she gone mad—? My mother died when I was born——

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Nodding her head.*]

That is right—she died——!

POPPY

You—you horrible Chinese woman—you—my mother!—How dare you!

[*She goes to OSHIMA.*]

She is lying—Oshima—you know it——

OSHIMA

I think for once—she tells the truth——

[*MOTHER GOD DAMN's lips move—her hands are clenched.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Cha-Kan-i-ko-ya!

OSHIMA

See!—She is calling on some god!—I have never seen her do that before——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Cha-Kan-i-ko-ya! Keep my hands still! Keep them still!

OSHIMA

[*Slowly to MOTHER GOD DAMN.*]

So—this is—the bone you hid——!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes—this is—the bone I hid—! Now, Mr. Dog, put your tail between your legs—and go fast away! Look out—that this bone you brought to me—does not kill you—too!

OSHIMA

Yes—it is time for me to go!

[He starts to exit.]

POPPY

Where are you going—you're not going to leave me here—are you?

OSHIMA

It is no longer—my affair.

[MOTHER GOD DAMN goes to exit door and opens it.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Creep faster—Mr. Dog!

[As OSHIMA exits, POPPY runs to the door.]

POPPY

Oshima, you beast! Wait for me!—Don't leave me here—with *her*!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Closing door after OSHIMA.]

No—you cannot go!—

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

POPPY

Let me out!—Go away from me! Let me out!
Let me out, I tell you!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No!—

[She stands, her hands clenched, her lips moving.]

POPPY

[Panting, her voice breaking and cracking, her eyes starting from her head.]

How dare you keep me here! You're no more my mother than the Virgin Mary! My mother was English—not a hideous old Chinese amah hag—My mother was beautiful—she had yellow hair—you've got your brass keeping me here! You're trying to get even with me for what my father did to you! Oshima said he sold you to the junks! He ought to have cut you up in little pieces and sold you for dung! Stop moving your lips!—What horrible god are you praying to!—Say something, for God's sake!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Lifting her arms, her face drawn and terrible.]

The god says—Kill!

[She lifts her voice in a terrible cry.]

Cha-Kan-i-ko-ya!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

[She springs at POPPY and catches her around the throat.]

POPPY

Oh!—Oh!—Oh!

[With a scream she breaks away from MOTHER GOD DAMN, and starts up the stairs.]

[Stumbling, panting, screaming.]

Oh, God!—Oshima!—Father! Help me—God—oh, my God—she is going to kill me——

[She stumbles again, picks herself up, goes on, rushing blindly up from gallery to gallery. Swift and terrible as vengeance itself, MOTHER GOD DAMN follows POPPY.]

[In the weird light of the flickering torches—we see the two figures—one fleeing in futile terror—the other pursuing.]

[In the dim light of the topmost gallery, POPPY loses her footing with a despairing cry, and falls. Like Fate, MOTHER GOD DAMN is upon her. There is a moment's silent struggle in the semi-darkness of that height—then a railing crashes—and POPPY's body hurtles through the air—landing in a crumpled heap, on the floor, three stories below.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Lifting her voice in an awful wail.*]

Cha-Kan-i-ko-ya!

[*She comes rushing across the galleries—half falling down the staircases, crying out her strange Asiatic wails. At the bottom she pauses, then steals softly over to the dead body. She kneels and peers into the dead face. Slowly she begins to pull the body toward the staircase. The dance music rises and falls from another part of the house. Past the open window at the back comes a procession of merry-makers, chasing round the garden. We see the tops of their banners and the sticks decorated with fish and animal heads. We hear the drunken laughter and see the waving hands in the multi-colored light of the flares.*]

[*Slowly MOTHER GOD DAMN begins to pull the dead body of POPPY up the stairs—as the curtain falls.*]

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE II

Toward dawn. Before the Buddha of Priceless Jade—The Talking God of Ja Ken Kow.

This is the same setting as Act III—The Little Room of the Great Cat.

When the curtain lifts, the room is in darkness—save for a shaft of strange light cast on the Great Buddha, through one of the high windows. The curtains of the big window at the back are drawn and the stage is empty. There is a bumping sound in the passageway outside, the handle of the door turns, the door opens slowly. The figure of MOTHER GOD DAMN is seen faintly in the darkness. She is dragging the body of POPPY with her. Slowly, painfully, she drags the body into the room and closes the door. For a second she stands, her breath coming in labored gasps. Then she pulls the body slowly over to the great Buddha—and lets it fall. For a moment she stands in awful indecision—then she moves across the room aimlessly—her eye notices the opium set from which POPPY has smoked. She picks up the

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

pipe, lays it down. She moves under the gong and takes the cord in her hand—holds it and seems to think. She drops the cord, crosses to where POPPY is lying—and moves a screen so that it hides her from view—then she returns to the gong and pulls the cord three times. Almost immediately there is a light knock.

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Calling it.]

Is it—Cæsar-Hawkins?

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[Answering off stage.]

Yes!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Come in——!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[Entering.]

I've been waiting for three gongs——

[From the opened door the music from the celebration outside swells into the room.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Shut the door! Keep out that sound—keep out that damned—dance music—keep it out——

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS closes the door. MOTHER GOD

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

DAMN *listens, the music is still heard faintly.*
She points to the high window at the right.]

Shut that—too!

[As he obeys.]

—I wonder—I wonder—where do they go—the
ghosts in my house—on nights like this—it must
disturb them—too!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

The actors have come from the theater. They are
dancing an old Fu play—in and about the plum
trees—it's really an extraordinary sight!

[He pauses—looks at her.]

I say—how terribly, terribly white you are!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No matter—no matter—only for to-night—to-
morrow—the color will come back.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[Hesitatingly.]

I say—you feel all right—don't you?—You aren't
ill are you?—Let me do something for you, can't I?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Picking up the opium pipe from the tray.]

Tell me—you have tried this—what does it do to
you—I have always wondered——?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Opium?— Didn't you ever try it?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*With a little smile.*]

No—as you know—I have always been—above bad habits—but what will it do for one—who tries it—first?

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Things will begin to move away—things that are too close to you—you will see presently—from a great distance—and they won't matter!—Perhaps your eye, for a little while, will be like a god's eye—viewing the spectacle beneath—like a great sea of birth, death and sorrow—which somehow is good——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Ah—it cheats for one, eh?

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Yes——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*With a wry little grimace she tries to make humorous.*]

To-night—something is being pulled out of me—it is very painful!

[*She points to the opium.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Fix a little for me, will you?

[She gives a little laugh.]

I think I will try to cheat—whoever—had arranged the pulling!

[As CÆSAR-HAWKINS lights the little spirit lamp under the pill, she continues in an odd whimsical voice.]

To-night—at least—I can refuse to let—tomorrow—come into my mind! For once I will try to see—if I can lessen—a hurting thing——

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[Slowly.]

You know—I hate to see you like this— By Jove—I'd rather see you—angry!—Do let me do something, won't you?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[As she crosses to CÆSAR-HAWKINS—speaking with a piteous sort of dignity.]

Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins—I—I am very much alone—I—I—don't want low-class servant people—here—just now—asking many questions, crying out—running here and there! You—you have good breeding—you mind your own business—I shall be——

[She pauses.]

—grateful—if you will arrange some little matters for me!

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Pityingly.*]

Why—of course—I will!

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[*Continuing.*]

But you mustn't look at me—as though you wish to say “Poor woman” because that—I don't like——!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Embarrassed.*]

I beg your pardon——

[*To hide his embarrassment he busies himself turning the lamp lower under the opium.*

MOTHER GOD DAMN *continues—pausing for words.*]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

That girl—you know—who is hanging there—to advertise my place——

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS *nods.*]

I wish her taken down—you must watch and see that the coolies do not jerk the rope—or bump the cage—and when they take her out, talk to her—in the funny, pleasant way you have, and tell her—there is no need to be—despairing or afraid— Tell her I have decided—the bargain with Tong Kai Li is off—and that instead—I give her to a high-up English father—who will be kind to her!——

[*She pauses.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Then take her to the amah—and tell them to clean off all the paint—all the patchouli—take off all the Chinese clothes—and fix her up—nicely—in some little Europe dress—and leave orders please—when this is done—just as I say—she is to be taken to—to—Sir Guy Charteris——

[*She points.*]

He is in the little black room under here.

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[*Nodding.*]

I know—Tsa is sitting outside the door——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

He will ask perhaps about another girl—a girl named Poppy—you saw her, didn't you?—the girl that came last night with Prince Oshima——?

[*She pauses.*]

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Yes, I saw her. What shall I say about her?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Tell him—this Poppy is with me! I have taken charge of her—at last!

[*She clenches her fists.*]

Tell him—the girl he knew as Poppy Charteris—is no longer his affair—you understand?

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Yes——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

And tell him also—he must take—the daughter
I give him back to-night—get out of China—and
keep out!—You understand? Keep out!—And I
will not again—reopen—the account between us!
He has my word—but he must go!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

It shall be done—exactly as you say——

[He hesitates.]

Is that all?

MOTHER GOD DAMN

No! You must also tell Lin Chi—my clerk—
to send here—the washers for the dead——

*[She takes his hand—leads him by the hand—
pushes back the screen a little and points.]*

See her!—She was my daughter!

[Her voice breaks.]

The daughter of Mr. Blue-Eyes—and Miss Pink!
You see—I trust you very much, Mr. Cæsar-
Hawkins! How proud I was of her, you can never
know! For twenty years I have hugged between
—my breasts—one thought so happy—that it never
mattered how sad—a thing—my life was—I had
to live—and seemingly I was alive—but I lived only

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

in one thought, Mr. Cæsar-Hawkins! Ah—I hid a dream!—To-night I found—a bone!

[*She pauses—then continues.*]

—So high up—so learned—good and beautiful—I pictured her! Yes, always—always I made pictures—to myself—of her—when seemingly I sat—making mischiefs! So little does one know—another’s heart!—Then—then—to-night—there came—with Prince Oshima—to my house—this brothel—a screaming, laughing, slobbering, biting thing—you know me, Cæsar-Hawkins. I am hard and bold and bad—but you have my word—she was such a frightful thing—I washed the place upon my face—that she had touched—the only kiss she ever gave me—in her life of twenty years—my daughter!

[*She pauses.*]

Feye!—Manchu and English—they do not mix! In one body—four things fight—two minds—two souls—I knew it was the law! But I would not have it so!—I thought my hands the law! But I would not have it so!—I thought my hands were strong—I took fate into them and tried to deal it out—but though I ran—the gods faster—and to-night they caught me!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Poor—Miss—Pink——

[*MOTHER GOD DAMN lets her hand rest on his for a moment.*]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Good—boy!

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

[Putting his hand over hers.]

Your hand—is dreadfully, dreadfully cold——

MOTHER GOD DAMN

Yes—I—am cold——

[She continues to stare at the screen. CÆSAR-HAWKINS blows out the lamp from under the opium—packs the bubbling substance into a pipe and comes toward her. She makes no move—but sits there silent and staring. CÆSAR-HAWKINS lifts her hand and places the pipe in it.]

CÆSAR-HAWKINS

Mother God Damn—the aspect changes—for everything—as we see it—far or near! Try, if you can, now—to look from a long way off!

[MOTHER GOD DAMN takes the pipe and puts it to her lips—CÆSAR-HAWKINS with a pitying look, starts to exit.]

MOTHER GOD DAMN

[Dropping the pipe.]

No—no—it cannot be—it is not for me to cheat!

[She gives a desolate little laugh.]

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

Good boy! Leave me now! Leave me now—kind fellow!——

[CÆSAR-HAWKINS *exits*. MOTHER GOD DAMN *waits until the door has closed behind him—then takes from the table a long wide spread of yellow silk and stands as though to cover the dead girl. Her face works strangely. With a little moan she kneels and begins to straighten the huddled body—smoothing the tumbled hair—composing the twisted limbs—talking to the dead girl in little disconnected phrases.*]

Ah! Poor little Poppy—poor little Poppy! I first missed the way—not you! Then how fast the sins came—like ripples spreading when you throw—one pebble in the sea—fast—fast—one upon another! Poor little Poppy! You weren't to blame!—Tell me, poor little lost one! Tell me—will there ever be an end—to these ripples from the one pebble that I threw? Tell me—you have passed so far beyond me—you look so wise now! Tell me—will there be a ripple somewhere—a thousand years from now—still going on?—No—you cannot answer me! I won't bother you with questions! Sleep—poor little Poppy—I will sing you—the cradle song—I sang when you were new and little in my arms——

[*She gathers the body in her arms and begins to croon a lullaby—the queer chant with*

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

which Chinese mothers put their babies to sleep.]

Na—ngne—na ngne—no—ni—ne—na—na ngne
—na ngne—na—ni!—

[She finishes the chant brokenly, then rises and spreads the length of yellow silk gently over POPPY's body.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

